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PRINCESSES LADIES AND  
ADVENTURESSES  
OF THE REIGN OF LOUIS XIV





LOUIS XIV

[I cont.

# PRINCESSES LADIES & ADVENTURESSES OF THE REIGN OF LOUIS XIV

BY  
THÉRÈSE LOUIS LATOUR

*L'Histoire est le roman des Grands*

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TO  
MY DEAR HUSBAND  
WHOSE HELP AND COUNSEL  
HAVE BEEN MY SUPPORT AND GUIDE



" And if we search for the reason why all human imagination, fresh or withered, joyous or sad, turns with inquisitive intent to penetrate the Past, we indubitably recognize that the Past is the only road along which we can escape from our daily worries, from our unhappiness, and from ourselves. The Present is tedious and overcast—the Future lies concealed. All the wealth, splendour, and grace of the world are buried in the Past."

ANATOLE FRANCE

*La Vie en fleur*



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## PREFACE TO THE FRENCH EDITION

*My aim in writing these essays on the Women of the time of the Great King, has not been to present to the public new facts, such as may have been overlooked in the intimate histories, which eminent minds have unravelled, and great writers placed on record.*

*What I have especially tried to do, has been to make my heroines live again—to scrutinize their passions, virtues, and defects, their secret thoughts, and hidden desires—to reproduce their personal appearance, the progressive phases of their various actions, the influence that natural disposition and education had upon their lives, their choice of friends, and even upon their taste in dress. In addition to this, my aim has been to make my readers—as has been the case with my numerous audiences throughout Europe, during the past twenty years—enter into my personal emotions, and my pardonable curiosity, occasionally to peep behind the screen. I would have them respond, as have the thousands who have heard me speak, to my enthusiasms, sympathies, admiration, hopes, fears, and pity. But I well understand how much easier it is to achieve such a result through the spoken word than through the pen. Deprived of the intonation of the voice, the play of the eyes, the impressive pauses, and the rise and fall of the emotion, in correspondence with the progress of the narration, the written word loses that full sense of reality, such as is the function and the art of the conférencier to create. Should I, in these pages, have failed to overcome this difficulty, at least I can claim to have written simply and sincerely.*

*And so I trust that the great public—outside of France—which has always been so kind to me, will have no more difficulty than my own compatriots in following the lives of my heroines, and in familiarising themselves with the rôles played by the women of France in that century of pre-eminent greatness.*

TH.-L. LATOUR



# PRINCESSES, LADIES AND ADVENTURESSES

ANNE OF AUSTRIA  
MOTHER OF LOUIS XIV

[1601-1666]

When Anne of Austria arrived in France in November, 1615, for the purpose of marrying the young King Louis XIII, she was only just fourteen years old, having been born on the 22nd of September, 1601, at The Escorial. She had not even finished growing ; for the historians of that period describe her as being short, while Anne of Austria, at the age of twenty, was certainly tall.

Her arrival in France, despite all the ceremonial and display of her reception, was from her point of view distinctly *triste*. Her betrothed, Louis XIII, certainly went to Bordeaux to meet her, and even sent her a letter of welcome by special messenger to Bayonne ; but nevertheless he had a rooted objection to matrimony. On account of his delicacy, he had been spoilt from the day of his birth ; and as a consequence had become so selfish, that nothing interested him save his own requirements ; and, to him, the thought of a life-companion suggested nothing but boredom. Though his mother, Marie-de-Médicis, did all in her power to arouse in him some enthusiasm for the young princess, she utterly failed.

When Anne actually arrived, it was Louis' idea to hide among the crowd, in order to estimate the effect she was making on his people, and also to note the play of her countenance, when undisturbed by the consciousness of his scrutiny.

The day after her arrival, Louis, without any consideration for the Archduchess, went out wild-duck shooting ; and even on her wedding-day, the 25th of November, Anne was left

## ANNE OF AUSTRIA

lonely and neglected. In fact, during the ceremony the King confined himself to receiving the homage of the Court and the various personages who had come to congratulate him. He realized that he was looking uncommonly handsome, in his delicate costume of white satin touched up with mauve ; and it was much pleasanter to contemplate the self-evident effect his clothes were producing on the crowd than to turn his thoughts to the Queen.

In the evening, worn-out from having smiled so ingratiatingly throughout the day, he went to his private apartments, announcing that he intended to sup alone ; and he retired to his bedroom for the night, without a thought as to whether, perhaps, he ought not to pay some slight attention to the girl, who on that morning had become both his wife and Queen of France.

And loneliness and neglect, similar to what she experienced during the first moments of her sojourn in France, was to be the lot of Anne of Austria through long years to come !

Within the palace she was all the more isolated in that, in addition to the utter neglect of the King, the Queen Mother Marie-de-Médicis also displayed towards her a disquieting coldness. The latter reproached her, among other things, for having failed in deference towards her, in signing one of the first letters she wrote to her " Your affectionate daughter ", instead of " Your very humble, and very obedient servant ", which was the sacrosanct formula in use when addressing the Queen Dowager. The only person of her own nationality whom she was permitted to retain was Madame Bertaut—the mother of that same Madame de Motteville, who, later on, was to display such devotion to her sovereign. In such isolation there was evidently little for poor Anne to do—beyond feeling dull, regretting her sunny Spain, and attempting to find consolation in correspondence with those who had loved her and whom she had lost.

Such was her life up to the moment when an English Embassy—arriving from London, on the part of Charles I, King of England, to request the hand of the young Henriette-Marie, Louis XIII's sister—changed the whole course of her thought, and launched her on her first intrigue.

It was in May, 1625. The Chief of the Embassy was the



ANNE OF AUSTRIA  
Wife of Louis XIII ; Mother of Louis XIV





## ANNE OF AUSTRIA

Duke of Buckingham, the intimate friend of Charles I, a splendid peer, who, imitating the manner of kings, scattered his money in all directions regardless of expense ; and who, in the superb inconstancy of his thirty-two years, had lost all reckoning of his numerous amatory conquests. Richelieu, who had been appointed First Minister the year before and was gradually becoming more powerful than the King himself, had heard of his arrival in Paris with the greatest displeasure. " He is a man, as dangerous to nations as to kings and husbands ", had been his remark. And his apprehensions were changed into positive fear when he saw with his own eyes how strikingly handsome Buckingham was, how his whole personality seemed to radiate charm, and with what address he utilized the exceptional gifts that Heaven had bestowed on him. One swift glance was sufficient to assure that penetrating mind, with its astute and dispassionate power of discernment, that the man before him might even prove dangerous to the conjugal honour of Louis XIII and to the virtue of Anne of Austria herself.

Anne at that time was twenty-four years old. The promise of beauty, foreshadowed in her youth, had been realized to the full. She had superb, dark, lustrous eyes, and masses of chestnut hair falling in natural curls ; an appearance of health and vigour ; a tall and impressive figure ; and little hands, with long, slim fingers, daintily shaped and incredibly white. Possibly the contour of her face was not faultless ; and a certain carelessness with regard to dignity was reflected in her walk ; but such imperfections were lost in her general charm, and to Buckingham she appeared irresistible. That same evening of his arrival the English Ambassador wrote to his King : " The Queen and the young fiancée are the two most perfect beings in the world ". He naturally had to mention the King's fiancée ; but in reality, it was Anne alone who had proved so attractive to him.

On her side, Anne had immediately been touched by the distinguished and deeply courteous manner in which Buckingham had greeted her ; and she, whose husband had never noticed her beauty, whom Richelieu designedly kept in the back-ground, who was accustomed to be chided like a little girl, and whom no one thought of treating as a Queen, had

## ANNE OF AUSTRIA

thrilled with delight at finding herself for the first time treated as a sovereign by one who was not of her own nationality. And he who had done this was First Minister to a great King, a superb and princely nobleman, generous to a fault, the personification of the very soul of romance—and, by every glance and gesture, he had shown himself hopelessly captivated by the young Queen !

There was among Anne's personal suite a young *dame d'honneur*—the Duchesse de Chevreuse—with whom she had been intimate for some years past ; and this particular Duchess, who was in every way as romantic as Buckingham, desired nothing better than to have a chance of furthering the Ambassador's suit in respect to the Queen. No one understood better than she did how to interest Anne in the matter of his merits, charm, and feelings, and how to exalt the perfection of his wit and manner ; and she did this to such purpose that Anne found herself thinking a great deal of Buckingham, before he himself had made any definite advances.

However, on the second day after his arrival in Paris he ventured to break the ice. He had only a week before him in France, and he realized there was but little time to lose. He was sitting beside Anne of Austria at the royal banquet, when he risked his opening move ; and at the concert which followed afterwards he came more boldly into the open, referring to his own wife as " silly Katie ", and ridiculing her to the Queen—after all, merely in accordance with the approved custom of sacrificing the woman, who once was loved, as a propitiatory offering to the new divinity !

About the same time, the details of the journey respecting the departure of the Princess Henriette-Marie were drawn up ; and it was arranged that the two Queens were to accompany her, while the King during their absence was to repair to Fontainebleau. A numerous and brilliant suite was detailed to escort the Princesses, and it was the intention of everyone to make the sumptuous undertaking a matter of general gaiety.

The first halt was at Amiens ; and there the young Queen put up in a splendid private house possessing a charming garden. It was in the month of May ; and the flowers were flooding the air with their subtle scents, and the tender

## ANNE OF AUSTRIA

leafage of the trees was making its vernal appeal. But when they wanted to open the wrought-iron gate leading into the garden, alas ! no one could find the key—and, as so generally happens in such cases, the fact of there being a difficulty in the matter made the Queen only the more desirous of getting through. So they decided to get the door open despite the loss of the key, the courtiers vying with one another in their efforts to please the Queen. But, as one after the other dismally failed, the redoubtable Buckingham, smiling triumphantly in his superb self-confidence, advanced swiftly and gracefully, pushed aside the courtiers from around the gate, and with one blow of his sword, adroitly directed, broke open the lock. The door flew open to greet the Queen's caprice ; and Anne was like a child in the gratification of her whim. Although the dusk was falling fast, she ran into the enchanted garden ; and Buckingham, having in a way established his right to escort her, the Queen in her delight even accorded to him the honour of offering her his arm, for the purpose of conducting her through the perfumed grounds.

Buckingham was so overcome by the Queen's favour, and so intoxicated by the feeling that spring was in the air, that at once he addressed Anne of Austria with all the ardour burning within his heart. The Queen's suite, observing how animated was the conversation between the two, had discreetly withdrawn a little apart ; and so it came about—under the peeping stars, in the midst of the sensuous perfume, beneath the spreading trees, where the little birds were whispering their fond good-nights—Buckingham so far forgot himself as to fall at the feet of the Queen of France and to pour out to her his passionate avowal.

The very warmth of his declaration at once brought Anne of Austria to her senses. Dismayed at her own imprudence, and trembling at the danger of the situation, she quickly gave a cry of alarm, which at once attracted the attention of her suite. Buckingham, hastily rising, courteously withdrew from the Queen's presence, fully alive to the fact that she was very angry.

They did not see one another again at Amiens ; but at Calais, where the procession halted for the second time, a great ball was given, at which Anne of Austria appeared in all

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the radiance of her striking beauty. Buckingham could not resist the pleasure of approaching her—and he ventured to ask her forgiveness. The Queen had been too greatly influenced by his first attentions, *grand air*, and natural gifts, to permit of her maintaining her severity for long ; for, after all, he had only forgotten himself, merely as a consequence of the keen admiration he bore towards her. So, on the conclusion of the ball, the young Queen and the Ambassador of Charles I had again become the best of friends—and, as a direct consequence of this renewal of their friendship, Buckingham endeavoured to prolong the stay of the English Mission in Calais. Marie-de-Médicis was ill, and Buckingham declared that he could not be guilty of such cruelty as to deprive a mother of her daughter until Her Majesty had quite regained her usual health.

But Charles I, in London, was strongly insisting upon the departure of his fiancée for England—and Buckingham was compelled to yield. He made prolonged adieux to the two Queens ; and, when he was thought to be already on board ship, and the Queens were in their carriages for their return to Paris, he dashed up to the doorways to renew his farewells. He clung to that of Anne of Austria's ; and the Princesse de Condé, who accompanied the young Queen, had discreetly to turn away her face while he was addressing her ; but nevertheless she saw him seize the hem of the Queen's robe with passion, and rapturously press it to his lips.

However, parting had to come—and the following night saw the two Queens again at the Louvre. But they had only arrived a few hours when a horseman, his mount smothered in dust and sweat, appeared at the gates of the Palace. It was Buckingham—who announced that he bore an urgent message for the Queen-Mother. It was then not quite half-past seven in the morning, and the two Queens were still asleep after the fatigues of their journey. However, as Buckingham had been entrusted with the care of the Princess Henriette-Marie, it was feared that the message, brought by the English Ambassador, must necessarily relate to the young Princess ; so Marie-de-Médicis was roused at once. Marie, similarly thinking only of her daughter, gave the order that Buckingham should at once be brought to her bedchamber, she herself remaining in bed. The message, however, which the Duke

## ANNE OF AUSTRIA

communicated to the Queen related only to the Princess' *tastes*. The Ambassador of Charles I desired to have a complete list of the dishes which she preferred, and of those which she disliked. He apologized for having forgotten to ask such important questions before, and stated that it was merely the matter of their elucidation which had brought him back from Calais in such hot haste. The information for which he asked was vouchsafed him—and on the conclusion of his audience with Marie-de-Médicis, he begged the favour of being permitted to present his homage to the young Queen.

Anne of Austria, having been informed as to Buckingham's request, was anxious to know how her mother-in-law had acted; and, on being told that Marie-de-Médicis had received him in her bedroom, she did not see why she could not do the same. Accordingly Buckingham was introduced into the bedchamber of the young Queen. Madame de Lannoi, who was in attendance on Anne of Austria, sat by the bedside throughout the interview. The English Ambassador, more madly in love than ever, at once threw himself down beside the bed, passionately kissing the sheets, sobbing, and burying his face in the clothes. Madame de Lannoi, indignant at such behaviour, said to him severely: "My Lord, such conduct would be impossible to a gentleman of France". Buckingham remarked that he was not a gentleman of France; and, moreover, was passionately in love with the Queen. And then it was that Anne regained her self-possession. She ordered the English Ambassador to go. But the order was given without any suggestion of anger, and Buckingham, withdrawing from the bedside, walked backwards towards the door, casting on the Queen a look of utter adoration such as she was never to forget.

[Such are the incidents which inspired Alexandre Dumas, *père*, when writing his romance *Les Trois Mousquetaires*.]

On the following day, the two Queens joined the King at Fontainebleau, where rumours from the Court had already preceded them. Louis XIII's anger was intense. Anne of Austria's equerry was dismissed, several individuals of her suite disgraced, and the Duchesse de Chevreuse herself reprimanded, and threatened with banishment did she not

## ANNE OF AUSTRIA

behave more circumspectly for the future. Anne, for her part, after being severely admonished by her husband in the presence of his Minister, was forced to listen to the latter's detailed recital of the whole of Buckingham's intrigues, heavily embroidered with comment of a most unflattering description. But, though Richelieu spoke, Anne heard nothing. Her mind was still absorbed in the contemplation of that last, passionate farewell; and a voice of ineffable sweetness was still singing in her ears.

Notwithstanding the severity of her religious training as a Spaniard, Anne in this matter certainly displayed indiscretion to a marked degree; but her somewhat lax attitude towards a harmless love-affair such as this—and she saw in it nothing particularly reprehensible—is, perhaps, not surprising when one considers the undoubted influence of her husband's conduct in the shaping of her mind.

But the consequences of what may be regarded as a childish flirtation were destined to be more serious than could have been foreseen. Anne, for the first time in her life, had realized the power of her charm; and she knew that thenceforth she could find friends to assist her in any attempt she might make to gain her freedom. She had also made acquaintance with the joy of playing an important rôle.

And so the time comes when we find that the Queen, whom Louis XIII and Richelieu had so humiliated at Fontainebleau, no longer bears any resemblance to that slighted princess of 1624. She is now chafing against the power of Richelieu. She bears a grudge against her husband for being merely the instrument of his own minister, and for having no confidence in herself—and she makes alliance with all the malcontents to plot against the minister and the King. If Louis XIII will not dismiss Richelieu, the malcontents are prepared to replace him by his younger brother, Gaston d'Orléans. The young Comte de Chalais, who is violently in love with the Duchesse de Chevreuse, Anne of Austria's friend, is deputed to rid them of Louis XIII by thrusting a poisoned pin between the King's shoulders when helping him to dress. Madame de Chevreuse has sworn not to respond to the Comte de Chalais' importunities until the King has been thus punished for his adherence to Richelieu. Anne of Austria, after the King's

## ANNE OF AUSTRIA

death, is to marry Gaston d'Orléans, who is to be appointed King in the place of his brother, and Buckingham is to contribute to the success of the plot by conducting a raid on the Ile de Ré.

But Richelieu baffled all their plans. Sagacious, and admirably served, the minister discovered the plots. During the first months of its inception Buckingham was defeated; Chalais cast into prison, and soon after decapitated; the Duchesse de Chevreuse immured in the Château de Dampierre, and the Queen arraigned before the King in Council. Like a criminal, she was made to sit at the lower end of the Council table, and the King did not hesitate to pronounce her "*fausse, perfide, et ingrate*".

As a consequence of all this, the situation of Anne of Austria was dreadful. The King refused to have any further communication with her; the Queen-Mother, somewhat compromised herself, did not dare to address her; and an order, issued on the 27th of August, 1626, forbade any man to enter the Queen's apartments unless the King himself was present. Never had such an affront been imposed on a Queen of France!

And, whilst the Queen was punished with such severity, Gaston d'Orléans, as a consideration for the confessions he made, whereby he betrayed all his confederates, was pardoned, on the sole condition that he married Mademoiselle de Montpensier, the richest heiress in France (August, 1626).

But the only effect of her grave humiliation was to cause Anne of Austria to contrive further plots against the King and Richelieu. In 1630 occurred the conspiracy—nicknamed "The Day of Dupes", in which, owing to the illness of the King, the two Queens almost succeeded in overthrowing the all-powerful minister. In 1632 occurred the intrigues of Anne of Austria with Spain, which were hatched, thanks to the complicity of the nuns of Val de Grace, by Madame de Chevreuse and Monsieur Mirbel, the Spanish Ambassador. These intrigues, with which the Infante des Pays-Bas, the Duc de Bouillon, and many others were mixed up, pursued their course into 1637. But, once again, Richelieu became acquainted with every detail of the plot. During a Council at the Louvre, towards the close of 1637, after a few words had



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been exchanged between Louis and his ministers, Richelieu suddenly rose, and in a voice shaken with wrath denounced—with proofs, to support it—the secret correspondence of the Queen with foreign countries, through the medium of her valet La Porte and the Duchesse de Chevreuse. The Chancellor Séguier then exclaimed: “It is sufficient for the charge of high treason to be formulated against the Queen”.

The King, who had never loved the Queen, and whose jealous, suspicious, and irritated temper always prevented him from pardoning anything, seriously considered the question as to whether he should repudiate her altogether or cause her to be entombed in the cloister. But he very soon renounced the idea of repudiation when he discovered that it would entail his reimbursement of the Queen's dowry. So for several days he continued his cogitations, without communicating with the Queen. Nevertheless, she was well aware that La Porte had been thrown into the Bastille, and the Duchesse de Chevreuse incarcerated in the Forteresse de Loches; and, despite her courage, she was trembling with fright as to what was going to happen to her. She had always had a very good appetite, but she now remained a whole forty-eight hours without taking anything. Finally, the implacable Richelieu summoned her to Val de Grace, the centre of all the intrigues. Everything was ransacked in the place; all the nuns were cross-examined; the Abbess led away prisoner to the Château de Bussière; and the private papers of Anne of Austria were seized. Richelieu made her sign a long document in which she acknowledged her offence, asked for the King's pardon, praying him to keep her as his wife, promised never to do anything in the future without first informing either the King or Richelieu, and took oath to love and obey the King, her husband, to obey the Cardinal, and to repent her former sins. Having obtained her signature, Richelieu intimated that he would intercede for her with the King. But she was left for many a day in suspense, wondering whether she was to be rejected, or, in default, what was going to be her fate.

Finally Louis XIII sent her his pardon, couched in cold and spiteful language, carrying with it no trace of good-will. And she returned to the Louvre, where she lived in terror, surrounded by the Cardinal's spies, who reported to him every

## ANNE OF AUSTRIA

thing she did, hour by hour. There was nothing left to her, but to pray, and to look to Heaven alone for any alleviation in the conditions of what was practically an imprisonment.

Such alleviation, however, came to her when she was least expecting it. During these years of difficulty with Anne of Austria (1636-1637), Louis XIII had found his consolation in the deep friendship which he had formed with a young girl of the Court, Mademoiselle Louise de Lafayette. She was a person not only endowed with physical attraction, but with possession of all the virtues. She had no other idea in her mind than to be anything save the devoted friend of the King ; and, when she perceived that even this innocent friendship was disturbing to Richelieu, she came to the decision that she would take the veil at the Visitandines de Paris ; and, on the very day following the ceremony, Louis XIII proceeded from Fontainebleau to pay her his last respects.

And it was then that Sister Angélique, as she had now become, mentioned to the King that she had one great and final favour to ask of him. During the twenty-two years of his married life, France had desired an heir to the throne ; and Sister Angélique now begged the King to effect a reconciliation with the Queen, in order to meet the wishes of his country. Louis XIII hesitated ; but, while he was wavering between his rancour against Anne of Austria and his desire to please Sister Angélique, a terrible storm broke over Paris. Now, at that particular period it was the custom of the Kings of France, when they moved from one place to another, to have all their bedroom furniture moved as well ; and, whereas Louis XIII that day had had every intention of returning in the evening to Fontainebleau, he suddenly realized that there would be no bedroom for him in Paris. However, the storm was of such a nature that it was impossible not to recognize the imprudence of his returning to Fontainebleau that night. Even Guittaut, his valet, ventured to impress on him the evident danger of such an undertaking. And then Sister Angélique said to the King that she was convinced that God, in His goodness, had sent the storm for the sole purpose of reconciling him to his Queen. This argument so moved Louis XIII that, acting under the advice of Sister Angélique,

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he despatched his valet to ascertain from the Queen whether she would be so good as to offer her hospitality to the King.

Anne gladly welcomed the husband who had so neglected her—and in the following year a son was born to the royal couple. This child was christened Louis Dieudonné, in memory of the marvellous circumstances that had brought about the reconciliation of the King and the Queen.

However, even the general joy in respect to the birth of this child could not make Louis XIII forgive Anne of Austria her past misdeeds; and this was proved in his formal refusal to kiss her in public as a mark of his gratitude for having given him a son. He was the first King of the Capet dynasty to break this established practice. In spite of that, a second son was born in 1639, and the King became much more attached to this child than he was to his elder brother. Indeed, Louis XIII displayed an incredible severity towards the latter, who was afterwards Louis XIV. On one occasion when the little boy had ventured to laugh at the sight of his father in his night-cap, Louis XIII had him whipped for several minutes.

Complete sympathy, therefore, never existed between the King and the Queen. Consequently, when the King knew that his end was near, his chief occupation was the question of curtailing as much as possible the power of the future Regent, namely his wife. This had been impressed upon him by Richelieu at the time of his death in December, 1642. But, contrary to the expectation of the dying King, the Queen did not protest. She very well knew that there was a man in the Regency Council, already constituted by the King, who would not hesitate to annul the last will and testament of Louis XIII. And that man was Mazarin. It is related that when Richelieu first presented Mazarin to the Queen, he said to her "Madame, you will like him—he somewhat resembles Buckingham". Possibly the story is fictitious; but if it actually occurred, the remark was a prediction. To state that Mazarin—by means of his striking appearance unfathomable eyes dilating to the ardour of his temperament, incomparable elegance, flexible caressing disposition, and bewitching manner—had gained the heart of Anne of Austria even before her husband's death, would be perhaps to say too much; but,

## ANNE OF AUSTRIA

all the same, it is an assured fact that in the very early days of 1643 a political understanding already existed between the two, which led to the decree, enacted by the Parliament, bestowing unlimited powers on the Regent, Anne of Austria.

Such powers the Regent handed over to Mazarin, her First Minister, who gradually and insidiously became master both of France and of the Queen's heart. Voltaire has written : " The ascendancy of Mazarin over Anne of Austria was such as a man is bound to obtain, in the case of a woman, who is weak enough to submit to domination, and yet strong enough to persist in her choice." Mazarin, from the first, made himself indispensable to the Regent, whose natural indolence rendered it imperative that someone else should do her work. In this way, he established, through ingenuity, an ascendancy over her, which afterwards he maintained through love.

Was Anne of Austria ever married to Mazarin ? Such question was raised for the first time by the Comte de Laborde in 1847.

In spite of the number of conflicting opinions, it would appear that the answer must be in the affirmative. Mazarin, it is true, was a Cardinal ; but he never took the final orders of the priesthood, which alone forbid marriage. But the strongest argument in favour of their marriage is to be found in their correspondence. Therein Anne of Austria always shows herself loving and tender, while Mazarin in many places is cross and indifferent, in the manner suggestive of husbands rather than lovers. Again, Anne never would sacrifice her Minister, even in the most threatening days of the Fronde, when his dismissal would have made her so popular. Such fidelity is eloquent. It also shows that Anne of Austria had a capacity for emotion such as Louis XIII had never so much as suspected. But if she never betrayed it to him, might it not have been because he never gave her the chance ?

Anne of Austria had the profound sorrow to lose Mazarin in 1661—after the great Minister had assured the preponderance of France over Austria through the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and the rich marriage of Louis XIV under the Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659). Till the very last moment the Queen refused to quit the bedside of the man who had brought to her both happiness and power.

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After the death of Mazarin, Anne gradually lost interest in the affairs of this world, and gave herself, more and more, to religion. The extravagance and gaiety of the young Court was displeasing to her ; and there was nothing in the policy of the emancipated Louis XIV remotely reminiscent of the man she had so greatly admired. And so, in 1666, this Queen, who at one time had been so restless and ambitious, accepted death in a spirit of Christian resignation.

ANNE-MARIE-LOUISE D'ORLÉANS  
DUCHESSÉ DE MONTPENSIER  
(KNOWN AS LA GRANDE MADEMOISELLE)  
[1627-1693]

In 1627 France, having defeated the House of Austria in the Valteline, routed the protestants at the Ile de Ré, suppressed the rebellion of the nobles through its discovery of the Chalais conspiracy, and its application of the edict against duelling, desired only one thing more to enable her to enjoy with serenity the increase of power, which her great minister Richelieu had given her and was still expanding day by day—and that was the birth of an heir to the Throne. The King, Louis XIII, married to Anne of Austria in 1615, had still no heir ; and, what made things worse, was hopelessly estranged from the young Queen. The incidents connected with the brief sojourn in France of the gorgeous and volatile Buckingham, had greatly intensified the differences between the royal pair. And, a year later (1626), Anne of Austria had gone so far as to conspire against her own husband, and even to agree to her own marriage with her brother-in-law, as soon as possible after Louis XIII's death.

The ardent wishes of France had therefore to look elsewhere for fulfilment—namely to the junior branch of the Royal House, of which Gaston d'Orléans was the head. This young brother of Louis XIII was as pleasant to look at as he was faulty in character. He was jealous of his elder brother, and ambitious, though he had not the courage to support his own intrigues ; but he took the keenest delight in conspiring against the King and the minister, and then never hesitated to abandon, and even to denounce, his own adherents from the moment the plots were discovered. Unstable in temperament but a delightful talker, with an infectious gaiety of manner, he could at once bring people under the influence of his charm ; and he could forget them even more quickly if it

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suited his purpose to do so. It was to his complicity in the Chalais plot—the ultimate purpose of which was to place him on the throne—that he owed his marriage to Marie de Bourbon, Duchesse de Montpensier, the richest heiress in France. Instead of treating him with the severity that was shown to the Queen, who was disgraced; to de Chalais, who was executed at Nantes; and to all the other conspirators, who were either imprisoned or exiled, Gaston d'Orléans to obtain full pardon—had merely to make an extremely wealthy marriage with the young and very noble Duchesse de Montpensier.

Their union speedily received the blessing of God; for within less than a year from their marriage the great news was already being whispered around that Gaston was about to become a father. From this moment the young couple became a matter of capital importance. The whole of France took an interest in the situation. In all the churches prayers arose to God, begging that a son might be granted to the Prince and Princess. The King assigned the Louvre as a residence for Gaston and his wife. The heir to the throne could not be born elsewhere. The populace of Paris were especially moved by the event. Every morning the court of the Louvre was filled with Parisians, anxiously enquiring as to the state of the Princess. And every day, and in ever increasing numbers, passionate prayers rose to Heaven supplicating God to vouchsafe a son to the brother of the King.

The child was finally born on the 29 May, 1627. But it was a girl—Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans!

It was an immense disappointment. No one had deemed it possible that such a mass of prayers, and vows, and promises made to God could remain unanswered. However, the populace of Paris being more chivalrous even than the rest of France, they had no wish that the little girl should in any way suffer for the disappointment, which she herself had unconsciously produced. So they made her their child of adoption, favoured daughter, and most precious possession—to be made happy, even should conditions be adverse, and to be protected against one and all. And such feelings became stronger still when, seven days later, the baby lost her mother.



DUCHESSE DE MONTPENSIER  
Known as La Grande Mademoiselle, Cousin of Louis XIV





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Thenceforth, Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans, Duchesse de Montpensier could count on finding a tender father and mother in every Parisian—all being prepared to treat her as their spoilt and darling child. After having loved her in the first days of her life, because destiny had been unkind to her, and then because she had lost her mother so young, and her father was so little deserving of their confidence, they later on clung to her because she displayed so many of the characteristics of Henri IV, her grandfather. Anne-Marie-Louise to them appeared as the Child of France *par excellence*, the most popular descendant of their first Bourbon King.

Surrounded by friends and playmates, the young Princess was installed at the Tuileries, under the supervision of ladies of high attainment; and her Household-establishment was constituted on a semi-royal scale, as can be seen in the detailed account given by Monsieur E. Griselle in his *Maisons de la Grande Mademoiselle*, published in 1912. The child, who naturally was aware of her own importance, rapidly developed a character in which energy, resolution, and pride took the place of her father's sloth, vacillation, and general ineptitude. When quite young, her strong will could brook no restraint. One day when Madame de Fiesque, one of her instructresses, locked her up in her room because she had refused to obey, the Princess contrived to escape, and at once retaliated by locking her mistress up in the same manner. Nothing daunted the little girl, and all suggestion of authority was insupportable to her.

Never was the sense of independence more highly developed in anyone than in this girl, who was beginning to be called "La Grande Mademoiselle", in order to distinguish her from Gaston's second child by his marriage with Marguerite de Lorraine.

But the conception dominating all others in the mind of Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans was her deep-seated conviction in respect to the obligations imposed on her by rank. No other century could have produced a person exactly like her. Indeed, it was not her energy, resolution, or pride, howsoever strong they may have been, which really constituted her true originality. The fact that differentiated her from her contemporaries and from other heroines of history was the

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absolutely indelible impression stamped on her mind by the beliefs of her time. Richelieu had made royalty so strong that it would need but little time for it to become sacred. Louis XIII's successor was going to be regarded more as a direct representative of God on earth, than as a mere mortal ruler.

"The Power Absolute must needs have this respect.

When Monarch says a thing is such—it is correct!"<sup>1</sup>

Thenceforth everyone connected with that unique being, placed midway between God and man, was to become equally exceptional. And it would become a sacred duty for Princes and Princesses of the blood to remember who they were, and to prove themselves worthy of the royal fluid coursing through their veins.

Such was the preoccupation that inspired the conduct of Mademoiselle de Montpensier during the first portion of her life—and it controlled her throughout her first attempts at matrimony, when nothing interested her in the suggested fiancé save the question as to whether he was "Majesté", "Altesse", or merely "Monseigneur". The same inspiration can be detected underlying all her public acts—the daring and contempt with which she treated "le Mazarin", whom she scorned; while to the rebel of her own blood she gave help and friendship, regarding him even as a fitting husband for one of her own exalted rank. Considered from this point of view—and it is the correct one—the actions of La Grande Mademoiselle become in a way divested of that sense of the grotesque which is necessarily invoked by her exaggerated ideas as to her own importance as compared with her utter indifference to the feelings of ordinary people.

When one reflects that this daughter of a royal race was ready to marry anyone, from a baby to a sexagenarian, caring naught as to whether he were gouty or bodridden, brutal or mild, and acting thus solely because she felt it to be her duty to be true to her lineage, one no longer feels the same inclination to laugh at her. One may pity her, but one cannot but admire her abnegation.

Moreover, victim though she were to the exigencies of her

<sup>1</sup> ". . . On doit ce respect au pouvoir absolu.

*De n'examiner rien quand un roi l'a voulu!*"—Corneille.

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birth, she was possessed of many charming qualities, in addition to those sterner virtues already mentioned. She was sincere ; her mode of speech was frank, and of a picturesque quality ; she was unalterably faithful to her friends, most kind to her servants, and devoted to animals ; she took an interest in the sick and needy ; was attracted towards the pure and good, and had no commerce with things evil. Her religion was devoid of all bigotry ; and, if she had a weakness for gossip, she was prevented from ever saying anything spiteful herself, by the profound respect she had for her own dignity. Her intelligence, which was good, was not in tune with the ready wit of the quick retort. She preferred planning out schemes, and allowing her conceptions slowly to mature, to exerting herself to shine in conversation. She was, however, often faulty and unfortunate in her judgments. She was more at home in the exercise of kindness than of tact—a quality in which she was singularly lacking. But her *beauty* shone ! For the physique of La Grande Mademoiselle was one to inspire immediate admiration. She was tall, with a stately carriage and a head crowned with magnificent fair hair. Her skin was beautifully white ; her grey eyes were large, well-shaped, and intensely proud ; her nose, strongly “ *bourbonnien* ”, gave to her face its characteristic expression. Her whole appearance was distinguished and noble. During the winter of 1645, when, at a grand ball at the Palais Royal, Mademoiselle wore all the Crown-diamonds in addition to those still in the possession of the dethroned Queen of England, she was the cynosure of all eyes ; and she writes in her *Memoirs* : “ Lots of people told me that my beautiful face and *grand air*, white skin, and magnificent fair hair were quite as decorative as the precious stones that sparkled on my person ”.

It was in 1636 that the question of matrimony first entered into the life of the young Duchesse de Montpensier. She was then nine years old, and the aspirant to her hand was sixty. He was that same Comte de Soissons who had formerly sighed for her mother, and then for her aunt. The great age of the suppliant in no way dismayed the young girl ; her idea being that, provided his position in the nobility entitled him to make such an alliance, he would naturally be a most suitable

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husband. But the Comte was killed at the battle of La Marfée, on the 6th July, 1641, when, in co-operation with the Ducs de Bouillon and de Guise, he attempted to invade France with the purpose of check-mating Richelieu. The young Princess mourned him a little, as was only meet ; but she soon consoled herself by the consideration that, since he had died, it was evident that they had not been made for one another.

This was also the period in which she gave consideration to a project of marrying the Cardinal Infante of Spain, who, although Archbishop of Toledo, had not taken the order of priesthood, and as a consequence was eligible for matrimony. It may be that he himself had never thought of La Grande Mademoiselle ; but that had not prevented her from thinking of him. However, she was just as unfortunate in her second aspiration as she had been in her first ; for the Cardinal Infante died of tertian fever on the 9th of November, 1641.

His death had but little effect on Anne de Montpensier ; for her real desire was now directing her dreams towards a totally different quarter. Since 1638 the French Court had had a Dauphin. An unexpected reconciliation between Anne of Austria and Louis XIII, due, as it was said, to the prayers of Louise de Lafayette<sup>1</sup>, the King's most devoted friend, who had quitted the Court to take the veil of the Visitandines, had led to the birth of a son, after twenty-two years of married life—and the child, as a consequence, had been christened Dieudonné. Everyone attributed to him all the talents and all the virtues ; but no one admired him with so much ardour as La Grande Mademoiselle. In a moment of exuberance of spirits, Queen Anne had laughingly said to her niece, as she showed her the royal baby : " He will be your little husband "—and the remark had flooded the girl with joy. From that moment she played with the baby, as his little wife, and her most cherished aim became concentrated on the throne of France. But, in that she feared opposition on the part of Mazarin to such a marriage and realized how adverse Anne of Austria was to any such idea, though she in no way lost hope of one day marrying the future King of France, she never ceased to making inquiries by means of special messengers

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *Anne of Austria* for details regarding Louise de Lafayette.

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sent all over Europe in respect to crowned heads who were either unmarried, widowers, or the husbands of ailing wives. It was in this way that in 1644 her attention was drawn to Philippe IV of Spain, who had just lost his wife ; and in 1646 to the Emperor of Austria, Ferdinand III, who had also lately become a widower.

At the time of these two possibilities La Grande Mademoiselle was approached by the Prince of Wales, son of Charles I of England and of Henriette-Marie of France. Both mother and son had neglected neither opportunity nor effort to gain the Princess' heart ; and it is probable that the immense possessions of Mademoiselle had an attraction for a family that was so destitute that at this particular time it was dependent on the liberality of the French Court for its bare subsistence.

But Mademoiselle was of an opinion that a King without a throne was scarcely the *parti* for a Daughter of France. In addition to which, the training of the Prince had been so entirely different from that of Mademoiselle de Montpensier, that, when they did meet, they could find nothing to say to one another ; and she was puzzled to decide whether he was merely stupid or actually lacking in manners. An unlucky dinner dealt the coup-de-grâce to this particular advance on her part in the direction of matrimony. It was during the winter of 1647, and the Prince and La Grande Mademoiselle were dining at the same table with the King. The dinner—as was usual at the Court partaking of the nature of a banquet—included in its menu three courses of *rôtis*—roast-beef, leg of mutton, and ortolans. The Prince, who had been endowed with a good appetite, having first devoured several large slices of beef, attacked the mutton, of which he had more than one helping. But, when it came to the ortolans, he declined them, with some contempt. Mademoiselle, who happened to have a particular *penchant* for ortolans, considered that the Prince's choice definitely betokened his inclinations to be common, if not even coarse. From that moment she refused further to discuss the possibility of such a marriage—and a few days afterwards the matter was allowed to drop.

Her attempt to put herself into touch with Ferdinand III of

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Austria, however, was productive of more serious consequences. On the death of the Empress the Abbé de la Rivière, who was in the service of the Orléans family, had said to La Grande Mademoiselle: "You should marry either the Emperor or his brother". Gaston, for ever in a fright lest complications might arise out of his elder daughter's designs, had ventured to intervene by remarking to his daughter how very old the Emperor was as compared to herself. But Mademoiselle, with her customary promptitude, had at once replied that the position of her husband was a matter of much greater importance to her than his age. And, from that moment, her thoughts were directed towards the question of a possible marriage with Ferdinand III—or, of course, as an alternative, with the baby, Louis Dieudonné. She writes in her *Memoirs*: "The dream of the Empire so wholly occupies my mind that I can only regard the Prince of Wales as an object of pity." Accordingly she sent Saujon, her agent, into Austria for the secret purpose of broaching the question of the marriage. When, however, the Regent, Anne of Austria, discovered what Mademoiselle was doing abroad, she fell into one of those violent passions peculiar to her fiery, Spanish temperament. Proceeding at once in search of Gaston d'Orléans, she insisted that he should that very moment accompany her and speak to Mademoiselle in the manner she deserved; and both of them went off to the Duchesse de Montpensier, determined to crush, once and for all, that intractable spirit that believed itself able to undertake anything on the strength of its own judgment. But Mademoiselle was prepared for the assault. She held her ground against her father and the Queen, without allowing them to gain the slightest advantage. A terrible scene ensued. La Grande Mademoiselle surrendered nothing; but the Regent, exercising her full powers, cut short the negotiations, and Anne-Marie-Louise had perforce to renounce her dream of Empire for ever.

After this tragic disappointment, she was so depressed and unhappy that she contemplated availing herself of the liberty of action which her majority had lately given her, by entering a convent and taking the veil.

This crisis lasted six months—and then all the pent-up

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energy of her nature reacted with such force that shortly afterwards she entered upon what has been rightly termed the heroic period of her life.

That period includes those months of tremendous activity during which she threw herself into the civil war of the Fronde—from March, 1652, to July of the same year. The sympathies of La Grande Mademoiselle had always been on the side of the people of Paris and against the Regent and her minister. Was she not the adopted child of this City of Paris, which had never failed to indulge her and show her its affection? When the people had revolted against the exactions of Mazarin, it had always excluded Mademoiselle from the consequences of its fury against the Court. In 1645, when the Paris markets had been roused to defend their rights, the only person of royal blood who had been able to traverse the streets of Paris without danger had been Mademoiselle. All the chains had been raised at her approach, and, as in ordinary times, she had been greeted by the cheers of the Parisians. On the 26th of August, 1648, when Paris was studded with barricades, as a protest against the arrest of the most popular Members of the Parliament—Broussel, Blancmesnil, and many others—who, together with their colleagues, had formally resolved that all the Courts of Justice should unite to deliberate on Mazarin's fiscal measures, not only did Mademoiselle feel no fear, but the rising produced in her a positive sense of exultation. It is true that she left Paris with the remainder of the Court, on the 5th January, 1649, in order to avoid any possible violence on the part of the Frondeurs; but on the following day she did not hesitate to send her page back to Paris, to fetch certain articles which the Queen had not been able to take away; and it is also true that this page was cheered by the Parisians, because he belonged to the service of La Grande Mademoiselle. Finally, when the Parliamentary Frondeurs, after Condé had defeated them at Charenton, had signed the Peace of Rueil with the Regent (March, 1649), Mademoiselle was among the first to re-enter Paris. She preceded the Court by several months. It is on record that during the Parliamentary Fronde the most popular personages in Paris were its Archbishop, Paul de Gondy—whose passionate desire to obtain a Cardinal's hat had placed



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him on the side of the rebels—La Grande Mademoiselle, and the leading Members of the Parliament itself.

But it was not only the affection of Paris, which she strongly reciprocated, that was to make a Frondeuse of Mademoiselle de Montpensier. As a Bourbon, she was furious at the confidence which Anne of Austria placed in the man whom his enemies stigmatized as "the Sicilian scoundrel". She upbraided the minister on the score of his origin, character, and methods, but especially on his opposition to her marriage with her royal cousin. In the same way as Paul de Gondi had become a Frondeur, because he could not get a Cardinal's hat and would become so for the second time for the same reason, so La Grande Mademoiselle joined the Fronde mainly because Mazarin did not want her to marry the boy King, because she did not consider this same minister to be worthy of his position as adviser to the King, and finally because—uncertain, as she was, of her ability to succeed in marrying her young cousin—she was desirous of arranging a further alliance in every way suitable to her rank, and at the same time much easier to attain than the one she had hoped for, in 1646, with Ferdinand III. All these reasons were smouldering within the mind of La Grande Mademoiselle when an audacious act on the part of Mazarin gave them fresh force, impelling her to action. Since his defeat of the Parliamentarians, Condé—who had also brought glory to the new reign by his victories of Rocroi and Lens over the Spaniards—had made himself insupportable by the arrogance of his pretensions; and, on the 18th of January, 1650, Mazarin, with the assent of the Regent, arrested and imprisoned in the Fortress of Vincennes, Condé himself, his younger brother the Prince de Conti, and his brother-in-law the Duc de Longueville—the protagonists of the group, nicknamed "Les Petits Maîtres". But such arrest of the Princes produced an effect altogether opposite to what Mazarin had expected. Instead of intimidating the enemies of the Regency, it had merely exasperated them.

Great Lords and Ladies became Frondeurs. The Duchesse de Longueville even succeeded in turning Turenne against the Court. Paul de Gondi, who had not yet received the Cardinal's hat, which Mazarin had promised him at the Peace of Rueil, incited Paris to revive the Fronde. Paris again flew to arms,

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viewing with complacency the prospect of a new struggle—and Mazarin, confronted by a combination of Parliamentarians and nobles, gave the appearance of yielding by departing to the Elector of Cologne, leaving it to be understood that he had no intention of returning, since no one evidently wanted him.

But, before leaving France, the cunning Italian had released the Princes from prison, on the calculated assumption that it would not be long before their arrogance would bring them into conflict with Gondi, the Parliament, and the Parisians. And in this Mazarin was not deceived, for, shortly after their release, the greatest confusion reigned among the Frondeurs.

By this time the marked antipathy which La Grande Mademoiselle had always had for Condé was totally forgotten. She regarded him now merely as a Prince of the Blood, whose ailing wife might conceivably soon yield up her place to herself; and as one, who, equally with herself, thoroughly despised and cordially hated a foreign minister of whom the best that could be said was that he failed both in frankness and dignity. As a result of this reconciliation, Mademoiselle rendered Condé two immense services. The first was to throw open to him the city of Orléans. It was on the 25th of March, 1652, that Mademoiselle de Montpensier, transmogrified into a commander of an expedition, left Paris for Orléans. She started from the Luxembourg, where her father resided, at three o'clock in the afternoon in a splendid carriage. The crowd went *en masse* to the Luxembourg to see her off; and called to God with fervour to bless the enterprise of their favourite child. Cries arose in the streets of "Down with the Cardinal!" Mademoiselle, revelling in the supreme importance of her position—smiling at those, who were calling out, and thanking such as were praying on her behalf—gave, as she sat in her large feathered hat and magnificent riding-habit of grey and gold, the impression of a sovereign advancing to take possession of her throne. On reaching La Beauce, she left her carriage, and mounted her horse, and at once assumed the functions of a real commander-in-the-field—arresting couriers and intercepting despatches. Through one of these despatches she discovered that the royal army also had decided to seize Orléans—despite the fact of its being the capital town of the appanage of her own House—and the news

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caused Mademoiselle to push on more rapidly. At Toury, however, where the army of the Fronde was encamped, Mademoiselle stopped, in order to preside over a council of war; and, while she was there, a message arrived from Orléans begging her to remain outside the town, or, if she herself were desirous of entering it, to come alone, as they feared the King's anger. Her reply to this message was superbly in keeping with the attitude she had assumed. "I am coming straight to Orléans", she said—and she refused to prolong the conversation.

It was on the 27th of March that she arrived under the walls of the town, but only to find the gates closed. Mademoiselle ordered the gates to be opened—with the sole result that they passed her out a box of sweetmeats! Then, accompanied by several of her ladies, she went the round of all the gates in the ramparts. Not one of them opened to her demand, and many of her own followers began to betray traces of distinct uncasiness; and it is highly probable that such faint-heartedness would have grown apace and that ere long, the leaders of Condé's army, who were already restive with regard to Mademoiselle's authority, would have openly displayed their enmity—had not the sailors of the Loire suddenly come to the assistance of the fair commander. They enabled her and her companions to enter Orléans, by contriving an opening near the Brûlée Gate and scarcely had La Grande Mademoiselle entered the town than her success was complete. She was borne in triumph upon the shoulders of the inhabitants throughout the streets. The populace cheered her, kissing her hands, and indulging in extravagant joy. However, Mademoiselle herself was by no means satisfied while the greater portion of her suite was still outside the walls; so, speaking in a tone of great authority, she ordered that her escort should at once be allowed to enter the town; and this was done. On that same evening she assumed the command of Orléans, as delegated to her by her father. On the following morning the keeper of the King's Seals, attended by many persons of the Court, claimed the right to enter Orléans. Mademoiselle de Montpensier, surrounded by her officers all wearing her colours, watched their entry from the top of the tower commanding the principal gate. She informed the keeper of

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the seals that she was mistress of Orléans, and that no hope remained for the Mazarins. And to this triumphant reply was to be added in a few days the defeat of the royal army by Condé at Bléneau. On the day of her entry into Orléans Mademoiselle assembled the municipal authorities at the Town-hall, and explained to them their duty, and what was expected of them by the Fronde.

However, after a few weeks of royal authority in Orléans, what with the difficulties of governing the town, the jealousies of the Frondeur leaders, and the fact that Paris was so far away, La Grande Mademoiselle came to the conclusion, that she was beset by more troubles than she had ever imagined would be the case. So she resolved to go back to Paris, and left Orléans at the beginning of May. Her return was one long triumph. At Étampes the soldiers received her as though she had been a commander-in-chief; Turenne, who had reverted to the King's service, provided her with a brilliant escort as she passed through the royal armies; and Condé, accompanied by a suite of lords and ladies, met her at Bourg-la-Reine. Gaston alone was annoyed at seeing his daughter return; for he was jealous of her popularity, and worn-out by her energy. She has herself written respecting the ovations she received at this time: "It was just as though I had been the Queen of Paris."

However, the royal army was far from being definitely beaten; and the army of Condé was by no means master of the situation.

In the end, Paris wearying of the struggle, declined to allow Condé's soldiers to re-enter within its walls; and, whereas the Frondeurs could not be victorious unless they became masters of Paris, Condé, on the 1st of July, 1652, surrounded the city with his troops. At daybreak on the 4th July, however, these troops were attacked by the King's army, under Turenne. Vainly did Condé perform prodigies of valour. The King's soldiers were in much greater numbers than his own, and well-led, though in a totally different way from the methods employed by himself—and he recognized that he would never get the better of them. So, at six in the morning, Condé sent a message to Mademoiselle de Montpensier, imploring her to come to his aid. And just, in the same way as she had started

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for Orléans, and afterwards had managed to enter that town Mademoiselle did not hesitate for a moment on receipt of the message. She leaped out of bed, dressed in haste, and sped from the Tuileries to her father's residence, the Luxembourg. But she found Gaston in no way inclined to share her enthusiasm. As in all moments of crisis, the Prince pretended to be ill ; and said he could do nothing for Condé. But it was all to no purpose. An iron will like his daughter's was only strengthened by opposition ; and a terrible scene took place between the two. But she gained her point—Gaston handed over to her the keys of the Bastille.

Having gained this initial success, La Grande Mademoiselle at once started off to the Hôtel-de-Ville. On the way, the crowd, as demonstrative as ever, called out to her : " What is to be done ? You have only to order, and we obey." But in spite of such enthusiasm, the Hôtel-de-Ville people remained unmoved. Their attitude even suggested that they might have the same doubts in regard to Mademoiselle as her father had. But the Duchess knew so exactly how to talk to them, that in the end they yielded to her persuasions ; and as a consequence—thanks to her—permission was given to the army of Condé to enter Paris. With this good news Mademoiselle threw herself into her carriage, and galloped off to the Saint-Martin gate, through which the army of Condé would have to make its entry.

It was close by there, in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, that the two forces met, both Turenne and Condé having decided to offer battle, and make a bid for victory. The fighting was desperate, and Condé had never shown himself more daring. Turenne said on the evening of the combat : " I did not see one Condé, but a dozen ". Mademoiselle excitedly followed the ebb and flow of the contest, her mercurial and highly strung temperament assuring her at one moment that the fight was won, and convincing her at the next that all was lost. And as she was unable to procure exact particulars as to the course of the engagement, the idea struck her to go to the top of the Bastille towers, from which place she could bring into range every movement of the action. The matter was one of no difficulty, since the keys of the fortress were already in her possession. So she at once went and it was from

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that tower that she perceived the cavalry movement on the part of Turenne, the object of which was to cut off the retreat of Condé's troops into the town ; and it was then that she gave the order to open fire on the King's forces with the Bastille guns. These guns decided the action, giving to Condé the victory.

Her entry into Orléans was nothing in comparison to this prodigious feat, whereby the Duchesse de Montpensier had rendered Condé a service of infinite consequence. As the Frondeurs passed under the Bastille towers, they acclaimed her as having saved them. This 4th July, 1652, was Mademoiselle's greatest day. She was justified, at the moment in believing, that her aim was attained ; and that, as she had stated on joining the Fronde, she would be in a position to dictate her peace-conditions to the Court. She felt convinced that she had won Louis XIV—or at any rate Condé—as a husband.

But on the heights of Charonne, where with his young King he had been watching the action, Mazarin, on learning that the Bastille guns had been fired by order of La Grande Mademoiselle, at once thought what he afterwards put into words: "On the 4th July the Bastille guns killed Mademoiselle's husband."

As a matter of fact, Condé's victory did not produce the results which the Frondeurs expected. Even before the action of the Faubourg-Saint-Antoine Mademoiselle de Montpensier had difficulty in comprehending that the feeling of Paris had turned against Condé. But now the assembly, which met a few days afterwards at the Hôtel-de-Ville, openly showed its lack of sympathy with the Fronde. The moment was favourable to the King and Mazarin, and they well knew how to profit by it. Condé was ordered to make his submission, and, as he refused, was compelled to take refuge with the Spaniards, where he lived, amid the enemies of his country, till 1659. Nor was La Grande Mademoiselle spared by Louis XIV. The King directed her to leave the Tuileries, and to proceed into exile to Saint-Fargeau, in the present-day Yonne department. Never again was she to occupy the Palace of the Tuileries, where for so long she had been an object of tender regard to the people of Paris. On starting into exile, the Duchesse de Montpensier had not even the consolation of

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knowing that, though the Fronde had lost her a King, it had at least given her a Duke—for the Duchesse de Condé had recovered, and all hope of marriage between the victor of Rocroi and La Grande Mademoiselle had gone.

At Saint-Fargeau, Mademoiselle de Montpensier held her Court, and was surrounded by every luxury. Problems of the heart, and the sacrifices imposed by matrimony, were favoured subjects of discussion there; but Mademoiselle always approached such discussions from the point of view of the Princess rather than from that of the woman. She seemed to have an absolute control over her emotions, but, despite her attitude, her *entourage* was well aware that she found life at Saint-Fargeau very dull. She missed the Court, and Paris; and the emptiness of her enforced exile was necessarily accentuated by the thought of her former glory.

It was, therefore, a great joy to her when Louis XIV pardoned her, recalling her to Paris in 1657. But although, at the time, she was still young, the days of her glory, momentous designs, and audacious exploits were over. The Emperors and Kings whom she had thought to marry were already married, or about to do so. She herself was about to take part in that triumphal progress which achieved its end at Saint-Jean-de-Luz in the marriage of Louis XIV and Marie-Thérèse, daughter of the King of Spain. Mademoiselle, then, was feeling very lonely in her grandeur, and was beginning to question whether her life had been exactly what she would have wished. At the age of thirty-five, however, she came into contact with a further project of marriage—Louis XIV having made the suggestion that she should marry the King of Portugal. But this particular King was found to be so hideous, both physically and morally, that the project was abandoned.

It is just at the time, when it would have been thought that the life of La Grande Mademoiselle had become entirely immune to "the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks" of our existence, that it suddenly jettisoned the politico-heroic, and became romantic. She had arrived at the age of forty-two, and had never known real love. Pride of name and obligations of rank had with her taken the place of sentiments of a more disturbing character. But, in the spring

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of 1669, a casual incident at Court having drawn her attention to the Comte de Lauzun, Mademoiselle's heart lost its splendid equilibrium, and, for the first time, became acquainted with love and all its torments. The hero who had thus transformed her was a Gascon cadet ; and, like all other cadets of his country, Lauzun possessed that wonderful verve which scintillates with all the radiance of their southern sun. He was of undaunted courage, and his wit was never at fault. He was the pet of all the women. On the other hand, he was very ugly—and with an ugliness that could not escape attention ; for he was quite short, with a face like a skinned rabbit, and a head of hair like tow—and his face was one perpetual grin. His sole fortune was his fine family—for he was one of nine, and his parents had not the wherewithal to make any one of them a suitable allowance. Louis XIV came under the influence of his charm to a greater extent than anyone ; for he forgave him for what he certainly would not have forgiven anyone else, namely, having the audacity to hide himself under Madame de Montespan's bed, with the intention of intercepting the secrets of the royal favourite.

Such was the man whom La Grande Mademoiselle loved madly—of course, after convincing herself that a Gascon cadet practically belonged to so ancient and noble a race as to entitle him to the love of a daughter of the blood royal. She, who had had neither mother to love her nor father to give her care and affection, whose friends even had never been disinterested, and whose prejudices in regard to race had gradually frozen her heart, now suddenly finding herself swept into the fire of an ardent love, believed happiness to be within her grasp. Unfortunately Lauzun had not the slightest love for La Grande Mademoiselle. She was too imposing and rigid, with too much of the Princess about her, to offer any attraction to that little man, who bubbled over with originality and caprice. He certainly never paid her an ardent compliment, nor evinced towards her any tenderness whatever. He was, besides, younger than she was, having been born in 1633 ; and, far from politely ignoring such a point, he actually laid stress upon it. Mademoiselle, however, pursued him, in spite of his indifference ; but his coldness towards her had no power to diminish the intensity of her



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love. And the force of this passion made Mademoiselle most eloquent when she spoke to the King on the matter of her marriage with Lauzun ; in fact, she pleaded to such purpose that Louis XIV finally gave his consent—the news of which Madame de Sevigné announces in a most amusing and delightful letter, in which adjective follows adjective in breathless succession (15th of December, 1670).

But once again Mademoiselle met with disappointment. At fault in the matter of her love, as she had been in the whole organization of her life, she planned the details of her coming wedding on such a scale as to necessitate extensive preparations, thus giving Louis XIV ample pause to think. He withdrew his permission ; and the marriage, of Mademoiselle de Montpensier to the Comte de Lauzun with all its pomp and circumstance, never took place. It is, however, quite certain that they were married secretly—a marriage which so irritated the King that it was not long before Lauzun found himself in prison. From that moment La Grande Mademoiselle employed energy, influence, and every means in her power to bring about his release. She even sacrificed a large part of her private fortune to effect it. But when Lauzun finally returned, he evinced no gratitude for all that she had done. On the contrary, he made her understand, both by act and word, that to him life with her was insupportable—and they definitely separated in 1684.

The romance of La Grande Mademoiselle, therefore, miscarried in the same way as had her political intrigues and dreams of ambition. Even her death was to be marked by a painful incident, in continuation, as it were, of the long series of her misfortunes. She died on the 5th of April, 1693. Orders were issued for a splendid funeral, to do honour to her memory. But at the moment when the ceremony was reaching its culminating point, the urn containing her remains fell and broke scattering its contents upon the floor.

Why, then, is it, that from birth to death, misfortune pursued this great Princess through every important event of her life ? May it not be found in the fact that the circumstances surrounding her rank, having placed her in a delicate position, she had neither the judgment nor tact to compete with the intricacies of the situation, in which she found herself involved ?

# ANNE-GENEVIÈVE DE BOURBON-CONDÉ

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[1619-1679]

Anne-Geneviève de Bourbon-Condé, daughter of Henri, Prince de Condé, and Charlotte Marguerite de Montmorency, his wife, was born in the Fortress of Vincennes on the 27th of August, 1619. The mother of the little girl was of such beauty that Henri IV had spent the last months of his life adoring her. But in that the Prince de Condé desired to be the only one to delight in his wife's beauty, jealousy had made of him a rebel. Even Henri IV's death, at the hands of Ravallac, the assassin, which occurred in 1610 before war against France had been declared, had not satisfied the Prince's desire for vengeance. He had fought against France, had been made prisoner and incarcerated in Vincennes. And as a prisoner, Henri de Condé, who was just as jealous as ever, despite the King's death, had demanded but one favour—to be allowed to have his wife with him. Although the Princess no longer loved her husband, she had generously, out of a sense of duty, agreed to share his imprisonment. And so a chain of romantic circumstances was responsible for the fact that the most brilliant heroine of the early years of the reign of Louis XIV was born in a gloomy stronghold.

The adolescence of Mademoiselle de Bourbon gives no inkling of the stormy character of the life in front of her. At the time of the reappearance of her parents in society, her only interests lay in piety and meditation. It is related that, at the age of fifteen, she begged Monsieur le Prince and Madame la Princesse to allow her to enter the Carmelite Order—an attitude probably responsible for her parents' decision to expedite her début at Court. This was fixed for the 18th of February, 1635, when the Court was giving a grand ball. At the news that she would have to be present, and even to dance,

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Anne-Geneviève, in her despair, ran to the Carmelites of the Rue Saint-Jacques, where she often went, Madame la Princesse being a Patroness of the Convent ; and there, with full heart and streaming eyes, the young girl poured forth the misery of her unhappy lot in being compelled to attend the ball. The mother-superior, greatly moved, assembled all the nuns of the convent in general meeting, for the purpose of ascertaining what advice should be offered to Mademoiselle de Bourbon. Much discussion took place ; and, after suggestions of all sorts had been made, and rejected, they finally decided that Anne-Geneviève would have, in obedience to her parents, to dress and go to the ball, but that she should wear, under her attire, a hair-cloth. Anne-Geneviève submitted to the decision of the Carmelites. She went to her first Court ball, wearing a hair-cloth—arriving a victim, remaining to vanquish, and leaving in a state of mental intoxication.

It is, therefore, safe to assert that this ball of the 8th of February, 1635, marked the beginning of Anne-Geneviève's *vie mondaine*. It was, in fact, the crucible from which the mystic and solitary child emerged as a young girl—brilliant in conversation, witty, and fastidious—in whom vivacity and sweetness were so agreeably blended as to give to her a charm that made her unique.

At the time of this moral and intellectual transformation, Anne-Geneviève de Bourbon was but sixteen ; but she was already in possession of such radiant loveliness that her contemporaries declared her beauty to be angelic. Her charmingly tender blue eyes expressed both kindness and intelligence. Her fair hair of a *cendré* tone, such as suggested the softness of a caress, was of a most delicate texture, and falling in a profusion of curls about her neck. Her face, of a pure oval, was enhanced by a colouring of such delicacy that, later on, it was described as having "the transparency of a pearl"—a colouring reflecting every shade of feeling that stirred the young girl's heart. She was of good medium height, but was to grow still taller ; and she had just that exact touch of *embonpoint* which accentuated her natural grace and gave a certain dignity to her as she moved. Her shoulders, arms, and hands were exquisite. Her whole personality already bespoke an artless sincerity of engaging charm, and a languor



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Duchess of Longueville



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of temperament that was one day, under the influence of passion, to have a brilliant awakening, but which now lay dormant, producing merely an effect of high-bred nonchalance.

With such a superabundance of gifts, emphasized as they were by birth and riches, Mademoiselle de Bourbon-Condé gradually became the young queen of the *Précieux* and *Précieuses*, who thronged the fashionable salons of the day. If she could take only second place at the Hôtel-de-Rambouillet, where the beautiful Julie d'Angennes was in all her radiance, undoubtedly she was the acknowledged leader at the Hôtel de Condé, Rueil, Chantilly, Liancourt, and La Barre, where her du Vigean cousins readily acknowledged her right to rule. She was to be met wheresoever people of culture and distinction associated. Surrounded by brilliant and witty friends, whose chief delight lay in the pursuit of *préciosité*, and profoundly admired by her brother the Duc d'Enghien, who, not having yet become the glorious hero of Rocroi, had himself become badly bitten by the *précieux* craze—Anne-Geneviève de Bourbon-Condé (in all matters of social enjoyment) took the lead among the youth of both sexes of the Court and Town.

However, the man who was to be her husband did not belong to the *précieux* and fastidious set, of which she was the soul. She had no choice in her own fiancé. It was Monsieur le Prince and Madame la Princesse who decided that point; and, having been influenced chiefly by one consideration—namely, his suitability as to birth and position in regard to their daughter—they finally selected the Duc de Longueville, who took precedence next to the Princes of the blood royal. The Duc de Longueville, in fact, descended straight from the illustrious Constable Dunois, bastard of Louis d'Orléans (Charles VI's brother), who had been created prince by Charles VII in consequence of his having contributed almost as much as had Jeanne d'Arc towards the restoration of his throne. And he was not only "born"—but he had good qualities. He was high-minded and upright.

But he totally lacked that delicacy of sentiment which was all in all to Mademoiselle de Bourbon; and he understood nothing concerning *préciosité*. He was fickle, erratic, and prone to discouragement when things were inclined to go

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against him. And, besides this, he had reached the age of forty, and was a widower, with two daughters. One of them, born by his first marriage, was as old as Anne-Geneviève ; while the other, the result of a passing love-affair with Mademoiselle Jacqueline D'Illiers, had concealed the shame of her birth under the veil of a nun. The Duc de Longueville was actually engaged in a further liaison at the time when the slow diplomacy of the Condés had succeeded in arranging a marriage between himself and their daughter—the lady in the case being the superb and intriguing Duchesse de Montbazon. Age had not withered either the beauty or the ardour of the Duchess ; and it was her pious hope that some day—after the death of the Duc de Montbazon—she would marry the Duc de Longueville, and to that aim she exerted all her powers to retain him under her charm. It was therefore to no purpose when Madame la Princesse authoritatively directed her future son-in-law to break with Madame de Montbazon. Monsieur de Longueville certainly promised ; but, knowing the Duchess as he did, he never for one moment imagined that the promise would be kept.

Anne-Geneviève was acquainted with the sentiments and situation of her fiancé. He attracted her in no way : his past displeased her, while his present was a source of resentment and humiliation. Realizing the quality of her own beauty, it became an offence to her that the Duke should prefer a woman of forty years old. But when she saw that her parents' choice was irrevocable, and it had been explained to her that a Princess owed it to her rank to marry in accordance with *les convenances* and not in obedience to her own heart, Anne-Geneviève courageously agreed to make the sacrifice ; and, having once yielded, never wavered.

The marriage took place on the 2nd of June, 1642. Anne-Geneviève at the time was twenty-two years and nine months old, and was exceptionally beautiful. Mademoiselle de Montpensier, when she saw her in her long veil proudly yet modestly moving towards the altar, impulsively exclaimed : " She has the beauty of an angel " ; and in her *Memoirs*, La Grande Mademoiselle was to repeat it, writing : " Mademoiselle de Bourbon, on the day of her marriage, looked very young, with the beauty of an angel ". On the conclusion of

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the religious ceremony, the animation of the young Duchess was as conspicuous as her dazzling beauty. The wedding festivities were on a brilliant scale, and it was during their progress that the Duke first realized that his young wife possessed charms even equal to those of Madame de Montbazon. But he had not the courage to disclose his admiration for fear of exciting the wrath of his formidable mistress. So Monsieur de Longueville continued to neglect his young wife. But, at the same time, his assiduities, and generosity towards Madame de Montbazon perceptibly dwindled. Such attitude was resented by both the ladies concerned.

Beneath the sweetness and amiability of Anne-Geneviève's nature lay a pride and force of character which never slumbered; and, smarting now under the sting of her husband's treatment, which she regarded as an affront to her family as well as to herself, she considered that it gave her the right of reprisal by looking for happiness wheresoever it might be found.

Being a *Précieuse*, and one of the most discriminating, she sought consolation in gallantry of a chivalrous, ideal, and mystical kind. Maurice de Coligny was her hero. Though very enamoured, he loved her as she desired to be loved—by words, and sighs, and tender attentions. But Madame de Montbazon, with rage and hate in her heart against the young wife, whose marriage had destroyed her hopes and whose charms were daily loosening her hold upon the Duke, was awaiting her opportunity to turn to good account any mistake the Duchess might make. Barely had the platonic love of Anne-Geneviève and Maurice de Coligny started before the Duchesse de Montbazon—who had been apprized of the affair—was narrating details regarding it embellished with a considerable embroidery of her own. And one evening two love-letters, not at all *précieuses*, but unmistakably passionate, written in a woman's handwriting, were found on the floor of La Montbazon's drawing-room. The news was spread far and wide, the Duchesse de Montbazon insisting that they had been written by Madame de Longueville to Maurice de Coligny.

But the real owner, who had so carelessly allowed them to fall out of his pocket, the dashing Marquis de Maulevrier, confided to the Prince de Marcillac—afterwards the Duc de la



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Rochefoucauld—that the letters in question belonged to him, and had been written by Madame de Fouquierolles. Upon this avowal the Prince de Marcillac obtained the letters from the Duchesse de Montbazou; and at the same time procured specimens of the Duchesse de Longueville's handwriting. Having done this, he forced everybody—the Condés, La Montbazou, and all such as had interested themselves in the scandal—to recognize that the writing of the letters in no way resembled that of the young Duchess. On completion of such verification, the letters were burned in the Queen's presence, and the innocence of Madame de Longueville was established.

However, the Condés insisted on more definite reparation in respect to their daughter's reputation. They demanded that La Montbazou should formally and verbally withdraw every suspicion against the young Duchess which her action had created. Such a demand was considered excessive by the Court. But, without the Condés' support, the Regency was not in a position to withstand the "Importants", that group of nobles who had determined on the dismissal of Mazarin. The Prince's eldest son, the Duc d'Enghien, through the exercise of genius and extraordinary skill, had just gained a definite victory at Rocroi—19th May, 1643—over the Spanish infantry, which had outnumbered the French troops by three to one. His exceptional ability had, in fact, inaugurated an era of military pre-eminence for France. How then was it possible to refuse anything to the Condé family, and especially to its hero, who was so devoted to his sister? Mazarin, feeling that under such circumstances a refusal would be dangerous, induced Anne of Austria to visit the Princesse de Condé at La Barre, for the purpose of discussing the formula, and of arranging the procedure of the act of reparation to be imposed on Madame de Montbazou. Their decision was that Madame de Montbazou would have to appear at the Princesse de Condé's and there make public apology in the terms of the formula which the Court would prepare.

Such act of reparation was accordingly made on the 8th of August, 1643; but Madame de Montbazou's attitude throughout was of so provocative and derisive a nature that the apology, instead of closing the incident, merely augmented the hatred between the two parties. This was noticeable in

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what is referred to as "*L'Affaire du Jardin Renart*". This garden, which occupied the exact site of the present-day Jardin des Tuileries was made use of, at that period, for grand entertainments of a private character. Madame de Chevreuse—at one time the Queen's intimate friend—who had not yet given up hope of regaining her ascendancy over Anne of Austria, who was now under Mazarin's thumb, decided to give a grand reception in the garden. The Queen was the first to be invited; and, realizing better than anyone Madame de Chevreuse's power of intrigue and the influence she possessed among the "Importants", she took very good care not to decline the invitation, though her affection for her former Lady-of-Honour was dead. However, she would not go to an entertainment composed nearly wholly of people hostile to the administration, without the support of one of the new friends of the Court. And this desire led her to select the Princesse de Condé to accompany her to the Jardin Renart. Such choice was in no way agreeable to the Princess, for Madame de Chevreuse was the daughter of the Duc de Montbazon by his first marriage; and, since her step-mother belonged to the same political clique as herself, Madame de Condé did not doubt that the Duchesse de Montbazon would be included among Madame de Chevreuse's guests. She informed the Queen as to her apprehension, and expressed a decided disinclination to attend the entertainment. But the Queen insisted, declaring that she was convinced that La Montbazon would never dare to put in an appearance at the Jardin Renart. The Princess, therefore, yielding to the persuasion of the Queen, accompanied her to the entertainment—and the very first guest that they perceived on entering the Garden was La Montbazon. By direction of the Queen, the Duchess was requested at once to withdraw; but she refused, and in a most public manner; and her attitude was supported by her friends. The Queen and the Princess immediately left—and on the following day the young King, Louis XIV, sent Madame de Montbazon a letter exiling her to Rochefort.

The "Importants", who were now more dissatisfied than ever, conceived a new plot, the aim of which was to assassinate Mazarin—since Anne of Austria would not dismiss him. The

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Minister, as usual admirably informed, gained cognizance of the plot before its full development ; and, resolute as he was prompt when necessity arose, on the 2nd of December he imprisoned the nominal chief of the " Importants ", the *beau* Duc de Beaufort, nicknamed the " Roi des Halles "—who was by bar-sinister own grandson to Henri IV—exiled to Anet his father the Duc de Vendôme and his elder brother the Duc de Mercœur ; sent the Bishop of Beauvais back to his diocese ; Madame de Chevreuse first to Dampierre and then into Anjou ; and imprisoned numerous other " Importants " ; and it is probable that, but for the insistence of the Condés in the matter of the love-letters, circumstances would never have given rise to such extremities.

However, the Duc d'Enghien, on his return from the army did not, even now, express himself satisfied in respect to the reparations made on behalf of his sister's honour. He proposed that the man who had been supposed to have received compromising letters from the Duchesse de Longueville should fight a duel for the purpose of proving the lady's innocence. And Maurice de Coligny, greatly enamoured and brave to a fault, declared himself ready to defend, at the point of the sword, the virtue of the woman he adored.

A young free-lance, Henri de Guise, who was more anxious to make a place for himself in the world of the nobility than solicitous as to the merit of the causes for which he fought, was constituted champion of the Montbazon's party—and the duel was fought, in great state, on December the 12th, 1643, in the Place Royale (now the Place des Vosges)—where, at that period, all the great families resided. On the day of the duel all the windows of every house in the *Place* were crowded with great ladies of the Court and Town ; and it was before this areopagus of beauty that the two assailants had to fight. It has even been pretended that Anne-Geneviève de Longueville was at one of the windows, hiding distractedly behind two of her friends. The fight began, the two swordsmen giving evidence of the same undaunted courage ; but Coligny, moved at the thought of the cause for which he was fighting, had not the same self-command as had his adversary—and he soon fell, dangerously wounded.

This *duel-spectacle* was to be the last of its kind in France.

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Never since the 12th of December, 1643, has there been in France a duel fought in public in the presence of a ceremonial array of spectators. Even at that period it caused a profound emotion. It was much debated ; and the romance of *Histoire d'Agésilas et d'Isménie* was founded on the event. But it raised the Duchesse de Longueville to a pinnacle of popularity ; and as at the time she was only twenty-four, and it happened to be the same year as her brother's defeat of the Spanish infantry, it was referred to as her " Rocroi ".

Maurice de Coligny, in the meantime, had been lifted from the ground and carried into a villa, belonging to the Duc de Condé, where he received the most devoted attention together with the warmest marks of affection ; but nothing could cure his despair at having been worsted in a fight in the cause of his lady's honour—a despair which prevented him recovering from his wound, and conducted him, slowly and sadly, to his death, which occurred at the end of May, 1644. This tragic death cast a great sadness over the youth of the Duchesse de Longueville. It was the first sorrow of a young woman who up to that moment had appeared to exist merely for the purpose of diffusing joy. Thenceforth a new element seemed to enter into her life. Madame de Longueville, though as lovely as ever, nevertheless from that moment seemed to carry with her ill-luck. Events for which she was personally responsible were to assume tragic and alarming forms ; and a chain of circumstances over which she herself had but little control was to bring misfortune which she would be the first to regret.

This ominous influence did not, however, arise till after the birth of her first son, Jean-Louis-Charles d'Orléans—on the 12th of January, 1644—and the month of triumph which the Duchess passed in Munster beside her husband, who had been appointed plenipotentiary to represent France at the Peace-Congress. Sharing in the veritable triumphal entry which the Duc de Longueville made into Munster on the 26th of July, 1646, Anne-Geneviève became practically the queen of the Congress, during the autumn of 1646 and the winter of 1647. Her radiance was disturbing both to diplomat and soldier, all ranks according her a general admiration. However, born Parisienne as she was, she felt herself always somewhat of an exile when not in contact with Paris itself and all its refine-

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ments of taste and mind. So this most cultured of *Précieuses*, who could find no attraction in her husband's society, seized eagerly on the two reasons which came to hand, to return to Paris—despite the fact that the Duke's mission was not yet nearly completed.

The first of these reasons was the death of her father, Monsieur le Prince de Condé ; and the second, her fresh hopes of maternity. Accordingly she left Munster on the 27th of March, 1647, her young brother, the Prince de Conti, meeting her en route. He had not seen his sister since leaving school ; and, dazzled by her beauty, charm, and prestige, his love for her resembled—in accordance with Madame de Motteville “ more that of a man of the world than of a brother ”—a species of adoration such as would explain the absolute dominion the Duchess obtained over the young Prince. But Conti was only one among many of the adorers whom the Duchesse de Longueville inspired in that enchanted world of wit and gallantry.

This year of 1647 may be regarded as the most brilliant period of her life. She became the focus of all aspiration ; and her *ruelle* was a centre for every intrigue. Prosperity and happiness encompassed her ; and she revelled in the growing glory of the House of Condé and in the consciousness of her own dominating wit and beauty. This period justifies the opinions which the sharp-sighted Mazarin has recorded with regard to the young Duchess. They had been inscribed by Mazarin in one of his note-books at the time when the ardent friendship between Anne-Geneviève and the Duke d'Enghien had been at its height, and previous to Madame de Longueville's move to Munster—but nevertheless, as viewed in the light of the events of 1648, they show subtle discernment.

“ The said Lady ”, Mazarin had written, “ openly boasts of having no use for people not at her feet. She accepts all homage and marks of favour as her right. Generally speaking her temperament is cold—her devotion to ‘ *galanterie* ’ having no relation to questionable intention, but being merely a means whereby to obtain adherents. Like her brother, she regards every concession in the light of an actual debt payable to her family, associates, or herself. She is very intimate with the Marquise de Sablé and the Princesse de Guéménée. Enghien,

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his sister, and several others are constantly meeting and criticising everyone freely ”.

It is true. The Duchesse de Longueville was in her secret heart so proud as to make her despise the Court itself ; in her opinions so independent that she spoke exactly as she pleased, and in her ambitions so rash as to open the door to many a danger. But the fatal danger that did open it was her sudden *grande passion* for the Prince de Marcillac, afterwards Duc de Rochefoucauld. Madame de Longueville at that time was thirty years old ; and up till then she had contemplated her power and her triumphs as might some serene and benignant deity—but her heart had never awakened to real passion.

The one who now was to become the adored and dictatorial master of her heart was born at Paris in 1613. He was, therefore, thirty-four in 1647, the year in which he entered into the Duchesse de Longueville's life, transforming it. He belonged to the oldest and wealthiest family in France—possessing large estates in Poitou and Angoumois. Though his education had been somewhat superficial, for he had entered the army at the early age of sixteen, he rose above all his contemporaries in the quality of his wit, which was of an infinitely subtle order. No others among them had the ability to talk with his assured ease, malice, and distinction. But the Prince de Marcillac was not one to talk at random : when he spoke, there was alway a very precise intention in everything he said. Beneath his outward courtesy lurked design ; and, when he quitted a friend or simply an acquaintance, it but seldom happened that such friend or acquaintance had not acquired a certain sympathy with the ideas and opinions of the Prince. His exquisite and distinguished manners suggested an underlying sincerity that was charming ; and they helped to give him that high-bred look which harmonized so well with his delicate face, elegant figure, and the general attractiveness of his whole personality.

His débuts into active life had been in harmony with his appearance. It had seemed as though he had been ready to sacrifice everything to the cause of the neglected and unfortunate wife of Louis XIII. He had been mixed up in all the plots and intrigues designed with the object of obtaining recognition of Anne of Austria's claims and of gaining for her

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the consideration that was her due. He had always been ready to oppose the terrible Richelieu, who distrusted the Queen, and encouraged Louis XIII's suspicions against her. He had even gone as far as to have had the intention of carrying off the Queen from the Court of the Louvre, and of taking her, together with Mademoiselle de Hautefort, one of her maids-of-honour, to Brussels, so as to place her beyond the reach of the King and the implacable Richelieu. The project, however, had never been realized; but, as a set off, Marcillac had assisted the turbulent Madame de Chevreuse—the Queen's most intimate friend and *fons et origo* of every intrigue set in motion against Richelieu—to flee into Spain. For this service the young Prince de Marcillac had passed a week's imprisonment in the Bastille. But beyond that, in 1639, he had refused the rank of *maréchal-de-camp*, offered to him by Richelieu as a reward for his bravery at Saint-Venant, because, in his capacity as defender of the Queen, he refused to owe anything to a Minister who was making her suffer.

However, on the death of Louis XIII, it became apparent that Marcillac's behaviour had not been quite so disinterested as had originally been supposed. The Prince expected to be well rewarded by the Queen. He was of the opinion that, on the ground of his devotion to her service, he had the right to claim any of the great offices of State. But Anne, from that moment under the influence of her new Minister, Mazarin, who had been recommended to Louis XIII by Richelieu, but whom she, herself, appreciated to such a point as to make him hermorganatic husband, refused throughout the course of two years to grant Marcillac anything he asked for. The acute intelligence of Mazarin was well aware that men of his calibre were better fitted for the work of conspiracy than for the exercise of wise and assured administration. But Anne of Austria, notwithstanding, continued to give evidence of her sympathy to Marcillac—but it was a sympathy that showed no tendency whatever towards materialization. So Marcillac, being finally convinced that he would never get anything from Anne, gradually passed over into the camp that was hostile to the Regent. His disappointment grew into bitterness; and his ambition, now compact of wounded vanity, spite, and desire for revenge, aggravated the inherent egoism

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of his personality. He became the impassive cynic, by whom all persons and things were regarded merely as possible instruments to be utilized for his own purpose. Thence onward, in spite of appearances, the amiable Prince de Marcillac loved no one but himself, and devoted himself solely to the furtherance of his own schemes of revenge. And it was in this spirit, and with these intentions, that he approached the Duchesse de Longueville.

"I was induced", he himself writes, "to venture on perilous ways, in order to make my resentment against the Queen and Cardinal Mazarin definitely felt".

The "perilous way" to which the Prince de Marcillac here makes allusion is the conquest of the Duchesse de Longueville through the agency of love; in order to utilize against the Court all the influences held in the grip of that pre-eminent woman whom he himself cynically refers to as "a stepping-stone to high position". But, frustrated in his project by the friendship of Anne-Geneviève and de Miossens, who afterwards became a "maréchal de France", his first business was to separate the two friends. And, when he had succeeded in this, he commenced in respect to the Duchess one of those courtships—respectful yet passionate, tender yet violent—in the practice of which he stood unrivalled. He who had been so gallant to so many women in the past—for he was particularly partial to feminine society—had never shown himself quite so irresistible as he did now in his pursuit of Madame de Longueville. And she, subjugated by his manifold charms, physical, intellectual, and romantic, never had a suspicion that the man who was falling on his knees before her was a dissembler and not a lover. She gave herself to him—taking pride in her surrender—absolutely, body and soul. She sacrificed everything to him—her reputation, of which she had been so jealous—her family, in which she had such pride—royalty, of which her family was the chief support—her personal interests—and even that sentiment which up till then had been the strongest of her life—her tender affection for her brother Condé.

Without losing one instant, Marcillac proceeded to mould his conquest into a shape, such as would best serve his own sorry ambitions. He developed the energy which still lay



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latent within her, and which love alone could arouse. He transformed her natural coquetry into political ambition, or rather into the pursuance of such ambitions as were his own. Madame de Motteville has written : " It was for the Prince de Marcillac that Madame de Longueville became ambitious ; she ceased to care for repose ; she forgot her reputation ".

Once that lover-without-love had made the Duchess his puppet, his one desire was that she should entice everyone, over whom she had any influence, to place himself or herself in opposition to Mazarin and the Regent. The Duchess set herself to work at once. But she failed in respect to her mother ; and Condé, who though he fancied himself to have a multitude of grievances against the Government, would not give a definite decision. Conti's attitude, however, was as always to be in favour of anything that his sister desired ; and the Duc de Longueville was gained over by his wife as a consequence of his own discontentment with the Government. He had been very humiliated at having been given so little real power at Munster, and he bore a grudge against the Cardinal for having refused him the governorship of Le Havre. In addition to this, his temperament found attraction in situations of a complicated nature, and in audacious attempts against the Court. La Rochefoucauld, therefore, was assured of at least three allies of the Condé family to help him in his contest against Mazarin and the Queen ; even though the Prince himself should refuse to fight against a King whose throne he had been instrumental in consolidating.

At the same time as Marcillac was thus putting all his strength into his attempt to retaliate against Anne of Austria, Mazarin by the imposition of fresh taxation on the people had roused the Parliament and the bourgeoisie against him. The Parliament, although its rôle was almost exclusively judicial, fortified by its " right of remonstrance " to the King, refused to register two of Mazarin's financial decrees. The Regent's anger was extreme. But, realizing that she was not at the moment in a position to resist the Parliament, she affected to accept with good grace the parliamentary hostility towards the financial edicts, deciding to await a more favourable opportunity before dealing with the turbulent magistracy as she desired. And she believed that this oppor-

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tunity had been given her in Condé's victory over the Spaniards at Lens (August, 1648). So, at the moment when Court and Town were thanking God for the victory in a solemn *Te Deum*, three members of the Parliament were being thrown into prison, under the order of the Queen. Paris protested vehemently; and, as even the President of the Parliament, Mathieu Molé, could not, despite his personal intervention with the Queen, obtain their release, the city resorted to the barricade (19th of August, 1648). Mazarin fully realized that the Parisians were not likely to withdraw their support from men such as these, who had attempted to protect their pockets from the Government. He, therefore, frightened at the gravity of the movement, arranged with Anne of Austria for the release of the three members. But the incident convinced him that the Court had need of some great soldier to defend it. Was it possible for him, then, to recall Condé—a man at variance with himself, and still under the influence of his sister, who in her turn was entirely under the rancorous domination of La Rochefoucauld? Mazarin hesitated; but, finding the situation was growing worse, he finally recalled Condé to Paris on the 15th September, 1648, and asked him to undertake the protection of the Court against the malcontents. Thus Condé found himself in demand from both sides. His past services decided him in favour of the King. He announced that he was ready to shed his last drop of blood in support of the Crown. Anne of Austria's joy at this announcement was so great that, pointing to Condé, she exclaimed: "He is my third son!"—and the little King, Louis XIV, at the same time flew across to embrace him.

The Court had, therefore, got the better of Madame de Longueville, so far as Condé was concerned. The sequel to this royal victory was a most stormy scene between the Duchess and her brother. Madame de Longueville entreated the Prince to secede from the Court. But, for the first time in her life, she found him hard and bitter. He made her realize how greatly her intimacy with La Rochefoucauld—an intimacy now public property and generally criticized—had incensed and wounded him. Plain-speaking passed between them; and, when he went, they were both furiously angry and in total disagreement.

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But there was a man in Paris who wanted nothing better than to be given the opportunity of undertaking the rôle which the Duchesse de Longueville had expected Condé to play, and who, in the hope of getting hold of it, had been anxiously following the movements of the Duchess. This man was Paul de Gondi Coadjutor to the Archbishop of Paris, his uncle. He was a man of brilliant attainments and great activities, but of mean ambitions, who had made himself popular in Paris through his alms and eloquence. In order to obtain the Cardinal's hat, which Anne of Austria had promised him at the beginning of her Regency, he would have set the whole of France on fire; and he was helping Madame de Longueville in the organization of the rebellion, almost immediately after Condé had refused to place himself at the head of the Parliamentarians against the Court. In concert with the most daring of the Parliamentarians and with the Duc de Longueville and Conti, they assembled the conference of Noisy, at which a complete plan of civil war was decided upon. "So soon as I hinted to Madame de Longueville the rôle which she could play in the State, she displayed such excessive delight, as to baffle description", wrote Paul de Gondi at this period of his political association with the Duchesse de Longueville—and he would not have objected to have entered into more intimate relations with her; for he could, as he said, "have placed her in his heart between Madame de Guéménée and Madame de Rumereux".

La Rochefoucauld, at the time of the conference of Noisy, was in his Province of Poitou, where, according to his own account, he was in his official capacity endeavouring to calm down the popular excitement induced by the issue of Mazarin's two financial decrees. But, on his return to Paris, he at once eagerly joined the confederacy.

On the other side, Anne of Austria, finding herself now in a position to make use of the troops released by the Peace of Westphalia (24th of October, 1648), resolved to waste no further time in bringing the recalcitrant Parliamentarians, the "Importants" rebels, and the bourgeois malcontents, to heel. Accompanied by the young King, Louis XIV, Mazarin, and the friends of the Court, she decided to leave Paris on Twelfth Night (6th of January, 1649) and move to Saint-Germain,

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while Condé was to advance with fifteen thousand men and invest the Capital. But, before leaving the Louvre, Anne sent a note to the Princesse de Condé, inviting her, together with her daughter the Duchesse de Longueville, to follow her. It happened that the Duchess on that particular evening was at the Hôtel de Condé, where they were celebrating the Epiphany. She resolutely declined to accompany her mother to the Court, under the pretext that her approaching maternity precluded her from travelling. Conti, discovered in bed by his elder brother, was abruptly ordered to proceed to Saint-Germain. The Duc de Longueville, also, did not dare refuse to accompany Condé to the royal Château when his brother-in-law formally asked him to do so. Thus two of the leading rebels were made to join the friends of the Regent and her Minister. But, through the skill and determination of La Rochefoucauld, their return to Paris was soon effected.

However, the Regent and Condé decided to deal with the situation peremptorily. A royal order was sent to the Parliament, enjoining it to withdraw to Montargis. At the same time, the municipal authorities of the Capital were informed that, immediately the judges had left Paris by one gate, the King would re-enter it by another. The members of the Parliament who should refuse to obey the royal order were to be declared guilty of high treason. A decree of the Regent in Council forbade the peasants to sell their cattle to the Paris butchers. The Parliament replied to these measures by issuing, in their turn, a decree in respect to the levying of troops, and Conti was elected Generalissimo of all the forces, notable "Importants" such as Elbeuf, Bouillon, and La Motte-Houdancourt being made generals.

In such way began the civil war of Louis XIV's minority—a war which the authorities affected to despise, nicknaming it "La Fronde" ("The Sling"), after a game played at that time with slings by the Paris boys in the city ditches; but which, in point of reality, was about to shake the throne of Louis XIV. In this war the women played almost as important a rôle as the men, and the intrigues occupied as much attention as the battles. When the Parliamentary army was fully organized, Paul de Gondi, with the purpose of sealing the union between the people and the nobles, conceived the

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adroit idea to advise the great Frondeuse ladies to confine the protection and the defence of their persons and children to the people of Paris, by taking up their residence at the Hôtel-de-Ville. No step could well have brought firmer conviction to the people that its cause and that of the nobles was identical, that all hearts were beating as one, and that all were fighting on an equality of brotherhood to the same end. As a consequence Madame de Longueville and the Duchesse de Bouillon went to live at the Hôtel-de-Ville, to the great joy of the Parisians. All the leaders of the insurrection came to pay them their respects ; and these great ladies were acclaimed by the warriors as the source of their inspiration and as their rivals in importance. They took part in the deliberations of generals and councillors, just as did numerous bourgeois who had been drawn into the struggle, possibly through love—like the Duchesse de Longueville—or possibly through a sheer spirit of adventure. All these romantic facts and fraternizations gave to the Fronde an heroi-comic aspect, such as no other civil war has had in a like degree.

On the night of the following 28th January (1649) Madame de Longueville gave birth at the Hôtel-de-Ville to her fourth and last child, the Comte de Saint-Paul. Many attributed—and and not without reason—its paternity to the Duc de la Rochefoucauld. The following morning, the Duchess sent for the Prévôt des Marchands, and begged him to stand godfather to the child, while the Duchesse de Bouillon was selected for its godmother. The Prévôt accepted with enthusiasm the honour which had been offered him, and, moreover, insisted that the baptismal ceremony should be of a sumptuous order. A brilliant procession of aldermen, councillors, and all the municipal officers, clothed in their splendid robes of office and preceded by drums and trumpets, fetched the child from the Hôtel-de-Ville, and conducted him to the Church of Saint-Jean. At the entrance of the church, the Coadjutor of Paris, Paul de Gondi, assisted by the vicar of the parish, received the infant with lively demonstrations of affection. The baby was borne to the baptismal-font, and there received the sacrament of baptism, with the names of Charles, Paris. The Prévôt and his assistants had asked that the name of Paris should be given him as evidence of his being

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the adopted child of the Capital. After the ceremony, which had not only been the most magnificent of its kind the Parisians had ever seen but absolutely without precedent, the Marquis of Noirmontier carried the little one back to the Duchess. To the great dissatisfaction of the Parisians, the young Comte de Saint-Paul was not fed at the Hôtel-de-Ville, but at the Hôtel de Condé, where his mother sent him with his wet-nurse, in order to assure him quieter and more comfortable surroundings. However, he was often brought back to the Hôtel-de-Ville for the purpose of paying his respects to his godfather and to the Town which had adopted him.

While the Duchesse de Longueville was thus flattering the vanity and sensibilities of the Parisians, the Duc de Longueville in Normandy, not only obtained approval as to his attitude towards the Fronde, but even succeeded in inducing his Province to support the Parliament's cause.

However, Condé had now reached Paris, with his soldiers ; and on the 8th of February, 1649, he attacked the troops of the Fronde at Charenton bridge, across which most of the food for the Capital entered Paris. The behaviour of the irregular troops was pitiful, ensuring an easy victory to Condé. There was a further fight on the 19th of the same month, in which La Rochefoucauld was wounded, and where the rebels were again defeated. But the Frondeurs retorted by attacking the minister with ridicule—embodied in a series of doggerel songs, the *Mazarinades*, portraying Mazarin in a grotesque and odious light.

In the meantime Condé's troops were completing the investment of Paris. The situation of the Frondeurs had indeed become desperate, when suddenly the great Turenne—superior tactician even to Condé, though his methods of attack lacked the impetuosity and quality of surprise that characterized the latter's—ranged himself on the side of the Frondeurs. It has always been a question how it came about that this great soldier, who up to that moment had so loyally served his King, ever joined the rebels. But it is probable that it was due, solely, to the fascination of the Duchesse de Longueville. He had met and admired her on the Rhine in 1646, and he had continued under the influence of her charm ;

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and when, at this time, he perceived her party to be on the brink of defeat, he may have hastened to her aid in the hope of turning the tide, without, it is conceivable, realizing that such a success must be gained at the expense of his King. But Condé beat Turenne in a quite unexpected way. Well aware that Turenne's soldiers were only mercenaries, animated by no other feeling than that of gain, Condé sold all his jewels to a Strasbourg banker, and with the proceeds bought most of Turenne's officers. This stratagem was a crushing blow to the Parliamentary Fronde. On the 4th of March, 1649, peace-negotiations were opened at Rueil between the Parliament and the Court—though the Parliamentarians refused to negotiate with Mazarin personally, on the ground that he had been condemned to exile. But Mazarin, with his usual pliancy and skill, regarding the success of the negotiations as of more importance than the preservation of his own dignity, gave the impression of having yielded the point, but continued to direct the proceedings from a distance.

In the meantime, the "Importants" together with Madame de Longueville—who grew more and more enamoured of La Rochefoucauld, and more inflamed with the spirit of vindictiveness which he had instilled into her—did not desire peace; and, with the object of preventing it, she attempted to open up negotiations with Spain. This attempt came to the knowledge of the Parliament and the bourgeois of Paris, and, repudiating the idea of conjoining with the foreigner against France, they immediately decided to make their peace with the Court. The bourgeois were the first to become friends again with the King; and a general amnesty was promised, exclusive, however, of the malcontent nobles; and the Peace of Rueil was ratified by the Parliament on the 30th of March, 1649.

One by one the nobles made their submission to the Court—the Duc de Longueville making, even in the ceremony of submission itself, such a display of pomp and splendour that it is open to question what was its exact significance. Was he sincere? Was his manner adopted with an intentional derision for the Court? Or, was it merely a manifestation of his own opinion that, despite all that had happened, he was just as powerful as he had always been?

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Her husband's submission practically compelled the Duchess also to make her peace with the Court. But she was in no haste to effect it—for the one who had launched her into the Fronde was as malcontent as ever, and she continued to have for him the same passionate admiration. So Madame de Longueville maintained her distant and revengeful attitude towards Anne of Austria. She fixed a time for her reconciliation, with the deliberate intention of making the Queen wait. When she found herself confronting the Queen, she made no attempt to show herself repentant or even amiable. She merely pronounced a few words, in a mechanical tone and in such a way that Anne readily understood that the Duchesse de Longueville remained her enemy.

In the meantime, the Court returned to Paris on the 18th of August, 1649, well knowing that it owed its good fortune to Condé. In fact, at the moment when the Prince took leave of the Queen, his task being completed, Anne of Austria said to him: "Monsieur, the service which you have rendered to the State has been so great that the King and I would indeed be ungrateful were we ever to forget it." After hearing these words, one of Condé's friends who was present at the time whispered to him: "The greatness of the service you have rendered makes me anxious on *your* behalf."

Acknowledgments of so high an order were well calculated to augment the pride and pretension of a Prince such as Condé. Having rescued the King from the Parliamentarians, he conceived himself to have the right to claim any of the Great Offices of State, including even that of First Minister. Mazarin gave him the government of Burgundy and Guyenne, but he chose to forget that he had also promised him the town of Montbéliard and many other advantages. What with the artifices employed by Mazarin to restrain Condé's power within the narrowest limits, and on the other hand the insatiable demands of the Prince, the imminence of a rupture became self-evident. In addition, the old "Importants" who, reinforced by young nobles whose age had barred them from taking part in the former struggle had changed its designation to that of the "Petits Maîtres", were endeavouring to influence Condé. This party—as the Duchesse de Longueville formerly had done—hoped to detach Condé



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from the Court, by flattery and emphasis on the wrongs under which he was suffering at the hands of the Government. The "Petits Maîtres," many of whom, inspired by the Duchesse de Longueville and La Rochefoucauld, had conceived a similar hatred against Mazarin and contempt for the Queen, were prepared to go to any lengths in order to gratify their antipathies and personal self-interest. The Throne was, therefore, again surrounded by malcontents, menacing the Peace, as signed at Rueil.

And the struggle began with the rupture between Condé and Mazarin. With a demeanour of pride and scorn, the Prince left the Minister, after having reproached him with his bad faith in not keeping the promises which he had made to him; and it is said that Mazarin, meeting anger with irony, made memorable his departure, by the words: "Adieu, Mars!" Nevertheless, shortly afterwards Mazarin sent a messenger to the Hôtel de Condé, in the hope of inducing the Prince to return—but to no purpose. On the 19th September, 1649, Condé was proclaimed leader of the "Petits Maîtres" to the great joy of the Duchesse de Longueville, the Prince de Conti, and even of Gaston d'Orléans and his daughter La Grande Mademoiselle. A supper-party given by Gaston d'Orléans brought the new conspirators together, and they drank to the success of the "Petits Maîtres" against the Court. And, in a short time, the arrogance of the Princes and their adherents rose to such a pitch that Anne, in her exasperation, imprisoned on one and the same day the Prince de Condé, his brother the Prince de Conti, and his brother-in-law the Duc de Longueville (January, 1650).

In order to have rendered this resolute act thoroughly effective, the Queen should have arranged the arrest at the same time of the Duchesse de Longueville—who was more exasperated than ever against the Court, owing to her increasing passion for La Rochefoucauld—and of the wife of the Prince. For these two Princesses, assisted by La Rochefoucauld, did not lose one instant in raising Guyenne, Burgundy, and Poitou against the King and Regent. Madame de Longueville had determined to stick at nothing—neither scruple, nor effort—to bring about the triumph of her friends.

Inspired by such sentiments, this second civil war, called

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"La Fronde des Princes", or "The New Fronde", was to become much more formidable to the Crown than had been "La Fronde Parlementaire", or "The Old Fronde". Madame de Longueville decided to move from Normandy to Holland, for the purpose of communicating with the Spaniards, and also of proceeding to the Meuse in search of Turenne, whom she hoped to induce, through his love for her, to take up arms a second time against his King. This flight of Madame de Longueville was most moving and dramatic. Not daring to set out on an ordinary passenger boat, she hired a small one to take her from France to Holland; but, in order to reach the boat, which out of prudence was kept at some distance from the shore, the Duchess was obliged to entrust herself to a fisherman to carry her out to the boat. While proceeding through the water, the man, either excited or unaccustomed to carry loads of such a nature, dropped Madame de Longueville into the sea. Plucked out, almost at once, from her watery plight, the Duchess was carried back to the seashore; but she was unconscious, and wholly incapable of starting that night. On the following day she proceeded on horseback to Pourville, where the parson consented to receive and conceal her. While Madame de Longueville was recovering her strength and building up new energy in the tranquillity of the parsonage, the Government was searching down the Norman coast, and examining the captains of every vessel they met in their endeavour to find her (February, 1650). In this way she lay hidden, for a fortnight; and then, dressed in man's clothes, she took ship from Le Havre to Rotterdam (30th of February, 1650). Landing in Holland, the Duchess lost no time in notifying her arrival to the Prince and Princess of Orange. Their Highnesses received her with every indication of joy and affection. Encouraged by her reception, the Duchess continued her journey to Stenai, where she found Turenne. From the first interview with the great soldier Madame de Longueville had the satisfaction of realizing that her beauty had the same power over him as of old. The victor of Sommehausen again placed his sword at the disposal of the Duchess; and she reinforced this initial success by securing an alliance with Spain. This new ally

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of Madame de Longueville undertook to support, even by arms, the cause of Condé and his adherents. However, Turenne was completely defeated by the royal armies at Rethel (December, 1650).

This defeat of the Frondeurs, however, did not produce the results which the partisans of the Regent's Government had reason to expect. As a matter of fact, though the Frondeurs were beaten in the provinces, Paris was again in a state of agitation owing to the instigation of Paul de Gondî, who was rightly irritated at the manner in which he was being treated by Mazarin. After the Peace of Rueil, the Minister had chosen to forget that, when the Peace had been arranged, he had definitely promised the Coadjutor a Cardinal's hat. Paul de Gondî was always expecting this hat to arrive ; till, finally, in desperation he started reprisals, and once more aroused the old grievances of the Parliamentary Fronde against the Government. So the only half-extinguished enmity of the Parliament and the Parisians against Mazarin broke out afresh, and at a time, too, when they were able to give powerful assistance to the Princes, in revolt. The Parisians took to arms in the same way as the " Petits Mattres " and their adherents had done, and both Frondes combined in an united hatred against the Minister. The Parliament demanded the banishment of Mazarin, and the New Fronde supported the Parliament's claims. The grave danger of this coalition, coupled with his knowledge of the underhand dealings of the Duchesse de Longueville with Spain, brought home to Mazarin the prudence of at any rate giving the appearance of having yielded. So he decided to withdraw into the electorate of Cologne, from which point of vantage he could easily continue to direct Anne of Austria. But, before starting, he cleverly took action well-calculated to cause confusion to his enemies. He released the Princes, reckoning on their arrogance and exaggerated pretensions to break up the *entente* with Paul de Gondî, who had his own ambitions to serve, and also with the Parliamentarians, many of whom would soon be tired of the Princes' extravagances.

In this Mazarin had calculated accurately. Not only did Condé and Gondî fall out ; but the Parisians and many of

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the Parliamentarians began to exhibit a marked antipathy towards the Prince, whose attitude towards them was one of scarcely veiled contempt. And Anne of Austria, on her side, refused to make Condé her First Minister of State. So, disgusted and exasperated, the Prince abruptly left Paris, departing with the object of fomenting the civil war in his province of Guyenne. The Duchesse de Longueville hastened to join him there, deeming it more advantageous to do so than to rejoin her husband, who also had been liberated on the departure of Mazarin into exile. She wanted to force her brother to recognize and to tighten the alliance concluded with Spain ; and, smarting under the consciousness of his Government's ingratitude, Condé was quite disposed to do so. As a matter of fact, an alliance with Spain did not appear to him as a sufficient set-off against the injuries under which he was suffering, and he sought a similar support from Cromwell. At the same time, the Duchesse de Longueville spared neither allurements nor activity in her endeavour to inflame the zeal of the Frondeurs. At the time, she never suspected that this vehement and passionate ardour in the cause of La Rochefoucauld would one day recoil on her own deep-seated love, exciting the wrath and reproaches of the very man who had made her a Frondeuse.

In the meantime Condé, strong in his alliances and the number of his adherents, judged the moment opportune to strike hard. Mazarin, had by then returned to France ; but Paris and the Parliament, as irritated against him as ever, had put a price upon his head, and were refusing even to open its gates to the young King on his way to meet Mazarin, who was returning with a small force raised at his own expense. Not being able to enter Paris, the Court and the royal army moved down towards Orléans, despite the questionable loyalty of Gaston d'Orléans and of Mademoiselle de Montpensier, his daughter—to whom Orléans belonged, being the Capital of the appanage of their Family. The best trump-card, however, of the Government, at that moment was Turenne, who had re-entered the King's service a few months before, on the occasion of his marriage with the daughter of Maréchal de la Force. He received the supreme command of the royal troops. Condé came into contact

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with a portion of these troops, under the command of Maréchal d'Hocquincourt, at Bléneau on the Loing, to the south-east of Orléans, and was within an ace of capturing King, Regent and Minister—a disaster retrieved only through the genius of Turenne (April, 1652). Later on, both Condé and Turenne turned their troops in the direction of Paris, and it was under the walls of that town that the most important engagement of both the Frondes was fought, namely the action of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Finding himself between the royal army and the town walls, Condé would certainly have been lost had not Mademoiselle de Montpensier—first cousin of the King, but a *Frondeuse* of the most romantic and daring order—caused the Bastille guns to be fired on the royal troops, while at the same time she gave orders for the Saint-Antoine Gate to be opened for the passage of Condé and his men (1st of July, 1652).<sup>1</sup>

But, having entered Paris, Condé could not maintain his position there beyond three months. Paris had begun to desire the return of its King, who had arrived at his majority the year before ; and, with a view of furthering this return, Mazarin discreetly kept himself in the background—with the result that Turenne, on the 21st of October, 1652, amid the enthusiasm of the populace, brought Louis XIV back to his Capital. However, on the following 2nd of February, Mazarin himself reappeared, likewise receiving a triumphant reception at the hands of the Parisians.

Concurrently with the gradual breaking-up of the Fronde, the outlook of the Duchesse de Longueville had become overcast and sad. Dating from 1651, she had entirely lost her great influence over the Prince de Conti, which had made her adoring brother her slave. The Prince reproached the Duchess—and justly too—with having helped to frustrate his marriage with Mademoiselle de Chevreuse, and the grief he had experienced in respect to the event had changed his old, passionate admiration for his sister into hatred. In 1652 the Duc de Longueville, who had been indulgent towards his Duchess to a well-nigh unlimited extent, suddenly came to the conclusion that her conduct was lacking in dignity, and ordered her with asperity to join him. The Duchess

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *La Grande Mademoiselle*.

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refused to obey ; for her intense love for La Rochefoucauld tied her to Paris, where he lived.

Meanwhile La Rochefoucauld, who had never really loved her and who had entered into a liaison with her for the sole purpose of furthering his own selfish and spiteful ambitions, was at that moment considering how to put an end to an intimacy for which he had no further use ; and certain imprudences committed by the Duchess, embroidered and amplified by those who reported them, gave him the pretext for which he was looking.

Carried away by the excitement of the struggle, and especially by her love for La Rochefoucauld during the second Fronde, Madame de Longueville had stuck at nothing in her effort to strengthen the party of the man who was to her the whole world. In the same way as she had concluded several treaties with the most active enemy of her own country despite the fact of her being a French Princess, so had she had recourse to *coquetterie* in order to gain over to the cause of the Fronde men, whom her arguments would have had no power to persuade. For instance, in September, 1652, when travelling from Berry to Guyenne in the company of the Duc de Nemours, who was under the sway of Madame de Chatillon, the Duchesse de Longueville utilized all her fascinations to separate the Duke and Madame de Chatillon, and to gain him over to La Rochefoucauld's cause. But howsoever dexterous and seductive may have been her *coquetterie*, there was nothing in her intercourse with the Duc de Nemours that La Rochefoucauld had the right to resent.

Meanwhile La Rochefoucauld's vanity had been deeply wounded by what had been narrated in respect to the Duchesse de Longueville and the Duc de Nemours. Without being in love with the Duchess, he was fiercely jealous of her. Was he not to write in his *Maximes* : " Jealousy is born with love ; but it does not always die with it."

So he reproached the Duchess in a manner that did not admit of any reply. He accused the Duchess of having had a liaison with the Duc de Nemours, and uncompromisingly broke with her. " When we are tired of loving ", he has written in his *Maximes*, " we are very pleased if the object

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of our past love becomes unfaithful, thus releasing us from our own infidelity." La Rochefoucauld, however, was not very pleased at that which he believed to be an infidelity on the part of the Duchesse de Longueville, because his pride resented the realization that another had been preferred to him; but he was very pleased to relieve himself of this particular liaison. It had lasted four years, during which, though to the Duchess it had been merely one long, uninterrupted adoration of her hero, to Rochefoucauld there had been constant irritation in respect to the attentions and admiration paid to the beautiful Duchess. While insisting that Anne-Geneviève should bring the whole weight of her varied powers to the support of his personal spites, he at the same time resented her beauty proving attractive, the alluring freedom of her manner, and the fact that she had recourse to the radiance of her own charms to gain new adherents to his cause. In breaking with the woman who had helped to build up the strength of his party, who had sacrificed everything to him, even her pride of race—before which the Queen herself had quailed—and who had loved him with a passion such as nothing could extinguish, La Rochefoucauld preserved neither delicacy nor proportion. He accused the Duchess not only of having betrayed the cause of the Fronde and that of their love, but even Condé himself. No word was too strong with which to brand his former ally. Through the base injustice of his accusations, it was as though he took his revenge for the fall of the Fronde, for his mortification of spirit, and for the physical tortures he had suffered in respect to the gun-shot wound he had received in the action of the Faubourg-Saint-Antoine, and which had temporarily blinded him. And La Rochefoucauld's hatred was to survive his sufferings and his strifes—for, eleven years after his rupture with Madame de Longueville, he had the cruelty, in his writings, to relate in detail the full history of his relations with the Duchess, whitewashing fact in defiance of truth, and blackening every act of the unfortunate woman.

In the meantime La Rochefoucauld's attitude had prostrated the Duchess with anguish and consternation. Youth, brilliance, love—all seemed to vanish beneath the intensity of her grief. Crushed under the burden of her sorrow and the

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sense of La Rochefoucauld's injustice, the woman, in the prime of her youth and beauty, craved for nothing but solitude and meditation. She found shelter at Moulins, with the Filles de Saint-Marie, whose Superior was the sister of Madame la Princesse. And there, in the silence of the chapel, amid the atmosphere of prayer and tranquillity which permeated the holy building, Anne-Geneviève found, little by little, if not forgetfulness, at least resignation. When her chastened spirit had reduced her passion to subjection, she recaptured the inspiration of her youth—the attraction of prayer, the happiness of belief, the austere joy of living with God. The faith of her childhood burned up afresh; and, Madame de Longueville, converted, and purged of her past errors, begged of the Duc de Longueville kindly to allow her to return to his home. Life with her husband began again, but in striking contrast to the past. The days of witchery and intrigue had gone; and the weeks and months went slowly by in penitence, and prayer, and a rigorous fulfilment of her duties; and she offered alms and oblations in abundance, in her attempt to make some reparation for the sufferings, caused by the civil wars, which she had provoked and excited.

When the Duc de Longueville died, in 1663, the Duchess passed most of her time at the Carmel of the Rue Saint-Jacques, in Paris; and there she continued to bewail her sins. She imposed on herself mortifications of such severity that her health was often affected. Thenceforth she was interested solely in matters of religion. In 1668 she helped to bring about the peace which the Pope granted the Jansenists under the name of the "Peace of Clement IX". And yet the cup of this repentant woman's sorrow was not yet filled up to the brim. One son alone remained to her—that same Comte de Saint-Paul whom Paris had formerly adopted, and who had become his mother's pride. His intelligence, courage, and nobility of birth had brought him the distinction of being elected by the Poles as their King. But, before going to take possession of his throne, the Comte desired to serve his own King in the war against Holland; and he was among those intrepid but imprudent young soldiers who, to prove their worth to Louis XIV, displayed daring and valour in



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forcing the passage of the Rhine at Tolhuys, on the 12th of June, 1672. Saint-Paul was killed ; and his unhappy mother was thus deprived of the one great and pure love that was left to her in life.

Thenceforth her mortifications increased in intensity : her penances became extreme ; and her prayers broke into the hours of her sleep. Her health finally could no longer withstand the sad and austere conditions of her life, and she died, in faith and penitence, on the 15th of April, 1679.

Anne-Geneviève de Bourbon-Condé, Duchesse de Longueville, undoubtedly committed grave faults ; but their committal becomes comprehensible when considered from the point of view of a character in which impetuosity and ingenuousness were so strangely mixed. When she fully understood the harm that she had done, she never could forgive herself. In judging her, posterity must not forget that this sorrowing woman was doubly punished—by the harshness of Fate, and by the self-imposed austerities of her own repentance.

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[1620-1705]

La Bruyère has written : " A beautiful woman who has the qualities of a man of the world is the most delightful thing on earth."

Such a delightful combination, uniting the charm of the woman with the qualities of the man of the world, was found in Ninon de Lenclos. And it is for this reason—despite the curious views she held concerning love—that she proves so interesting a type, whether we study in her the woman or the writer. Her actual merits were of such a nature as to make us lenient towards her defects. She has remained as charming in the eyes of posterity as she was to her own contemporaries ; so that, even down to the present day, we are making use of her name with the purpose of intensifying the charm of the various articles we design in the cause of women's adornment. Thus we talk of *blouses à la Ninon*, of *poudre à la Ninon*, *gaze Ninon*, and of *manches Ninon*. In fact, everything that is pretty and attractive in women's dress, provided it remain essentially feminine, appears to be called after Ninon. Another proof of the sympathy with which she inspires us is that, in speaking of her, we have preserved that affectionate diminutive under which she was designated by her contemporaries. Like her admirers of the past, we should be equally pained and astonished should anyone now refer to her by her real name of Anne de Lenclos.

It was at Paris, on the 9th or 10th of November, 1620, that Ninon was born. Her mother, Barbe de la Marche, was extremely pious ; while her father, Henry de Lenclos, was just the reverse. He was a philosopher, an epicurean, and a fine player on the lute. He was attached to one of the great families of France in his capacity of army officer ; but, notwithstanding his undoubted courage, his chief interest in life was the pursuit of pleasure. He held to the opinion that

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the chief aim of life was to enjoy onself. Both Madame and Monsieur de Lenclos attempted, betimes, to instil into their little girl their own particular views. From the age of nine Ninon went every morning to Mass with Madame de Lenclos ; but she had not reached the age of twelve before her father had given her to read the *Traité de la Sagesse* by Charron, and the *Essais* of Montaigne. The mysticism of Madame de Lenclos made little impression upon the spirited, robust, and curious nature of the little girl. Ninon adapted herself much more easily to the epicureanism of her father, and swallowed with avidity his theories, extolling the savour of life, laughter, and happiness to the exclusion of fear and religious remorse. And it was not long before she reached a point where she even forgot the respect due to the religion of her mother ; for it is related that she amused herself, in confession, by admitting to a long series of dreadful offences merely for the fun of startling her confessor, and delighting in his amazement. Possibly the story is not true ; but it is certainly in accord with Mademoiselle de Lenclos' mental attitude at the particular moment when Monsieur de Lenclos was compelled to leave his family. Such separation had become necessary through Henry de Lenclos having slain a nobleman—when alighting from his carriage—whose ideas and opinions had excited fierce discussions between them. As a consequence of this fatality, Henry de Lenclos had to pass his life in concealment abroad. Ninon was at the time about fifteen years old, and had already definitely decided to extract out of life all the happiness it could give her, to fling religious precepts to the winds, and to escape as soon as possible from her mother's wing.

The opportunity of testing her powers, and sampling her own conceptions of life, came to her with a certain Saint-Etienne, Captain of Light-Horse, and a sorry rogue. Madame de Lenclos included this questionable personage among her friends, seeing in him a possible husband for Ninon, at a time when Mademoiselle de Lenclos had but little chance of marrying. For these ladies, as a matter of fact, had some difficulty in making two ends meet—and the idea of a marriage portion was out of the question. In addition to this, Madame de Lenclos was extremely uneasy regarding



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N.B.—This is a reproduction of a portrait on enamel painted from  
an original portrait by Van Dyck



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her daughter's character and opinions, and was eager to shift her responsibility on to a husband. But Ninon herself had no inclination towards marriage. She was quite up to date on that point. The Hôtel de Rambouillet had been unanimous in their agreement that the Perfect Lover was not to aspire to the hand of his Beloved before he had spent long years in proving his merit and the quality of his love—and that the Beloved should prefer to remain merely the object of her Lover's admiration, to becoming the submissive wife of a man whom she had held so long in chains through the simple medium of her smile. Julie d'Angennes was to consent to become the Marquise de Montausier only after she had made the Marquis, who loved her to distraction, languish and pine for fourteen long years. And this heroic enterprise had already lasted four years when Saint-Etienne entered into Ninon's life. It was in 1656 that Madeleine Scudéry was to include in her *Clélie* the "Map of the Realm of Love," which condemned an aspirant to the hand of a Faire Ladye to pass through the various phases of "*Nouvelle Amitié, Grand Esprit, Jolis Vers*", etc., before being in a position to hope for any favour on the part of the Beloved. Ninon, then, only resembled her contemporaries in having no wish to marry at fifteen. In the same way, Molière was to make Armande say in his *Femmes Savantes*, in 1672, that she thinks :

"To be shut up, amid one's pots and pans,  
With ne'er a glimpse or gleam of joy, beyond  
One's squalling brats, and husband, cold as stone" <sup>1</sup>

would be to shorten life, and not even to ask for the happiness which it had to give. Ninon, therefore, listened to Saint-Etienne for the pleasure of hearing lover's talk, but with no intention whatever of making him a husband.

Saint-Etienne, moreover, did not interest her for long. Within a few weeks she replaced him by Raré, on whose behalf she tricked the maternal vigilance, now considerably aroused. Ninon had her suspicions that her mother was having her watched through the medium of a beggar, who

<sup>1</sup> " . . . claquemurer aux choses du ménage,  
Et de n'entrevoir point de plaisirs plus touchants  
Qu'une idole d'époux et des marmots d'enfants."

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used to come and play at her window. So she sought to purchase his adherence by throwing him a smart lace handkerchief, on receipt of which the beggar ran off, and did not return. It is said that about this time Ninon was kindly disposed towards Cardinal de Richelieu. But it is not very probable ; for Richelieu was then an old man, and Ninon, in her extreme youth, would naturally have been attracted by what was young and alluring. There is, therefore, good reason to believe that the story which shows Richelieu, crippled with age and infirmity, dressing himself up in a superb robe of pearl-grey silk, with the purpose of according Ninon a flattering reception, is a pure invention.

Ninon had many adventures in these early days ; but the first which left any definite impression on her life was her liaison with the Parliamentary Coulon, a furious Frondeur, who was to distinguish himself in the struggle which the Parliament sustained against the Surintendant des Finances, Particelli l'Emery. But what especially gave him his repute was the keenness of his intellect ; and Ninon, coming under its influence, allowed herself to be installed at his expense with a monthly allowance of five hundred francs. In fact, she loved nothing better than to come into contact with brain, the quality of which she would immediately test by the touchstone of her own.

When reference is made to Ninon, one instinctively thinks of her beauty. However, among her charms, beauty took only a second place—for her chief attraction was her intelligence. When she spoke, it was possible even to forget that she was beautiful, so keen, playful, and sparkling was the quality of her mind. For, under the direction of Henry de Lenclos, and in pursuance of her own instincts, it had gradually been formed and developed by a close study of the stimulating literature of the modern world. Not only had she read the old French authors, but Spanish and Italian writers were equally familiar to her, and she was acquainted with everything that her contemporaries had written of importance. But she had not the least pretension to being a woman-of-letters, and would have blushed to have been considered so. Her wit was spontaneous and natural, and never forced for mere effect ; and, in addition, she possessed

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qualities of a more serious character. One day she was discussing with some friends the attributes peculiar to each of the sexes. "I notice", she said, "that everything frivolous has been allotted to women, and all essential qualities apportioned to men. For that reason, from this moment, I shall be a man". She kept her word—in the sense that from that day she began to practise the virtues such as men hold in honour among themselves, and did not trouble herself about those which they left over for the women. Ninon was a perfect "*honnête homme*"—as the expression was understood in the seventeenth century. She was a loyal friend. She even carried her nicety with regard to friendship so far as to forbid any unkind word ever being uttered in her house concerning anyone known to her or belonging to her circle. Her income of ten thousand francs, which by careful and economical management she very soon acquired, was equally at the service of her friends as of herself.

It is related that one of her intimate admirers, Gourville, who had to leave France for political reasons, divided his fortune into two equal parts, each of which he placed in a locked casket. He confided one of these caskets to the most pious man he knew; and handed over the other to the care of Ninon. When, several years later, Gourville returned to Paris, he rushed to the virtuous man to whom he had entrusted the half of his fortune—but alas! his virtue had not been able to resist the temptation of the money. Even the casket itself had gone! Confronted by this disaster, Gourville lost all hope of the treasure which he had confided to Ninon. With saddened heart and dismal countenance, he moved towards her house. Disconcerted at his quadragesimal appearance, Ninon thought only of how to console him for his woes, and how to forgive herself for not having thought more of him during his long absence. Gourville, absolutely convinced as to his misfortune, at length ventured in a voice of despair, to put the terrible question. "What!" cried Ninon, "It's merely about your casket?—Here it is, exactly as you gave it to me. You gave me such a fright! I thought it was about our love".

Ninon was a model of honesty and devotion to her friends. The soul of equity and frankness in all her dealings, she was



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to be trusted with a certitude such as left no room for doubt.

The only side of Ninon's character that lays itself open to criticism is the manner in which she regarded love, and openly pursued it. Long previous to Sainte-Beuve, she was thinking that "the virtue of woman was the most wonderful invention of man"; and she announced unflinchingly, to her friends that she was assured that the rules and prescriptions for love should be exactly the same for both sexes. She saw no reason why, in this respect, she should behave differently from the generality of men. The absolute fidelity of which her heart was capable she reserved for friendship—which she considered to be a very superior emotion to that of love. The latter, to her, was only a passing fancy, based on the senses—a physical inclination, not necessarily implying the possession of either qualities or merit on the part of the one responsible for its origin. Love, from Ninon's point of view, was just a necessity, involving nothing. "Just as we eat and drink", she would say, "when we are hungry and thirsty, so in the same way we have to love when we feel so inclined". To this she added: "Man's object is to exalt love in accordance with the rules of propriety and honour; but such rules had no existence whatever in the primitive state, and are wholly factitious". She wrote to Rambouillet de la Sablière, whose heart had ardently responded to her charms: "I believe I shall love you for three months—to me, an infinity of time." It is said that her father, who had returned to Paris shortly before he died, made his last farewell to her in these words: "Take advantage, my child, of these precious years, and never be straitlaced as to the number of your pleasures—but be fastidious in respect to the choice". If such really was Henry de Lenclos' last counsel to his daughter, it can certainly be affirmed that she followed it to the letter. Ninon had a great number of lovers; but all such as she particularly favoured were distinguished men, in respect either of birth or of talent. Ninon's whole personality diffused a sense of love and pleasure. Her oval countenance was illumined by her large black eyes. She had a dazzling complexion and beautiful chestnut hair; a mouth like a cupid's bow, with a captivating and engaging smile; a

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playful and tender expression ; a soft and silvery voice of almost incredible fascination ; superb arms, with delicately modelled hands, and gestures instinct with grace and suggestion ; a suspicion of embonpoint, such as betokened perfect health ; and a happy disposition. And, over and above all these physical charms, her radiant good-humour stood out unequalled. She was accustomed to say : " We can lock up our provisions, but not our pleasures—for we need them every day "—and, as a consequence, she asked nothing from love save pleasure, and surrounded herself with joy and gladness. Horace Walpole called her : " Notre-Dame des Amours ", and Saint-Foix wrote, at about the same time : " Ninons are as scarce in this world as are Corneilles. It was reserved for the century of Louis XIV to produce the great and the marvellous in all their manifestations ".

Howsoever marvellous Ninon was in her manifestation of convinced epicurean, she knew how to be the stoic when circumstances made it necessary. She was scarcely one-and-twenty when she was stricken with so serious a malady that no one believed she would live. Her friends, overcome with sorrow, collected round her bed, not even daring to speak, for they knew how greatly she clung to life, and believed that she was about to die. She, on the other hand, was thinking more of the absurdities of the *Précieuses* than the solemnity of the situation ; and, summoning all her strength, she laughed out to her friends : "*Vais-je soupirer ou expirer ?*" (" Am I going to sigh or die ? ")—the *Précieuses* wanting to suppress the word "*expirer*", which they declared to be intolerable, and to substitute for it the word "*soupirer*". It is understood that, later on when she had again recovered her health and was in full possession of her wits, she labelled those whom she had had the courage to ridicule on what might have been her death-bed, with the neatest epithet that has been applied to the *Précieuses*, " The Jansenists of Love ".

As soon as she was convalescent, Ninon gaily celebrated her recovery in the company of the Chevalier de Jarsay, though he did not occupy her attentions long. However, we are not going to pursue Ninon throughout the whole length of her love-vagaries. They are too numerous and have been spread over too long a portion of her life for

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a short study to attempt to comprise them all. Saint-Evremond, in one of his letters from London, wrote to her : " You were born to love all your life. Not to love is a sort of nothingness, to which your heart could never adapt itself ". In fact, in the yellow salon of 28, Rue des Tournelles, au Marais, where all the princes, great soldiers, gentlemen, and writers of the period used to sit amid the charming rosewood and ebony furniture, there were as many lovers there as visitors. The most remarkable thing about her was that all her lovers became devoted friends when her caprice decided that love should cease, and that all these friends remained faithful to her up to the end. This faculty for transmutation, without essential loss, strikingly exemplifies the meaning of one of her favourite maxims : " To make love requires a hundred times more intelligence than to command armies." The esteem in which Ninon held friendship, together with her low opinion of love, resulted in her friends becoming the most dangerous rivals of her lovers.

Among these latter, we might mention a few whose adventures were somewhat piquant, exceptional, or dramatic. In this group must be placed the double love of Ninon for the Maréchal d'Estrées and the Abbé d'Effiat, at the time when her first son was born. Each of the lovers claimed with warmth the paternity of the child—and Ninon was much embarrassed in having to decide which of the two was right. And then an idea, original as it was simple, ended the difficulty. She stated that the only thing to be done was to draw lots for the child. Destiny, displaying great intelligence, gave the boy to the Maréchal d'Estrées, who happened to be much the richer of the two—and the delighted Maréchal gave his son a highly finished education. This young man, known under the name of the Chevalier de la Boissière, became a naval captain, and lived to a very advanced age.

Less curious, but equally amusing, is the scene of farewell between Ninon and La Châtre. The enamoured La Châtre was basking in the charm of his beloved, when he received orders to rejoin his regiment in the provinces. But how was he to guarantee his Ninon's fidelity during the time he was absent ? Torn with jealousy, he finally determined to make Ninon sign a pledge that she would be faithful to him so

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long as he was away. Ninon, who, as we well know, attached no moral importance whatever to love, signed everything that La Châtre wished ; but, when he had left her, pressing this extraordinary pledge to his heart, she, seized by a fit of wanton mirth, exclaimed : "*Ah ! le bon billet qu'a la Châtre*". The exclamation so exactly suited the occasion that it has passed into the French language, to signify the want of confidence inspired by any document offering a doubtful guarantee.

In 1648 Ninon followed as far as Lyons a certain Pierre de Villars—her lover of the moment, who had gone to a town in the extreme south of France ; but, arriving at Lyons, she discovered herself to be so bored with him that she left him in the lurch, and went for a few days to a convent of monks in the town, feeling that she was needing a little rest and repose. But, on the day after her arrival, all the monks were mad for her, and the Abbé the worst of the lot. Terrified before such an unexpected explosion of love, Ninon demanded by the mouth of the public crier and sound of the horn a house where she could live without being importuned with amorous declarations. The Mayor of Lyons, a certain Perrachon, offered her his, and Ninon accepted it, after having been assured that Monsieur Perrachon was a cold and austere man. But she had only been a few days installed in his house when he, too, fell at her feet, and confessed himself madly in love. Assured, thenceforth, that she had no chance of finding tranquillity in Lyons, she fled from the ardours of the south, and returned to Paris. And there she had the audacity to try and seduce the severe Bourdaloue, the famous French theologian ; but on that occasion her charms miscarried. However, as a compensation, she had the satisfaction of holding the Victor of Rocroi captive for nearly a whole year.

But a general attitude of such utter unrestraint could not fail to wound many susceptibilities. The clergy especially were unfavourably disposed towards her ; and they feared not so much Ninon, the woman, who trifled with love, as the intelligent and witty philosopher who, by her conversational powers, attracted around her the finest and most cultured intellects of the day. Many of these wits were as free-thinking

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as herself ; and they were not exactly orthodox themes that Saint-Evremond, Charleval, Delbène, Moissens—afterwards Maréchal d'Albret—and many others developed in the yellow salon. Discussions of the freest and most epicurean philosophy supplied, as it were, the entr'actes of love, at Ninon's house ; and it was on that account that the clergy and the bigots urged on Anne of Austria to take some action. But the captivating sinner was in no way affected by the underhand dealings of her enemies, though she was well aware of them. On the contrary, their conduct gave her a further stimulus. During Lent in 1651 she took a malicious pleasure in arranging her best dinners for fast days ; and, after one of such dinners, she had the impudence to drop one of the bones of the chicken, with which she had just been regaling a few friends, on to the nose of a Saint-Sulpicien cleric who was passing under her windows. It was the last straw ! The clergy redoubled their activities against her ; and, one day, she was confronted by a police-officer, sent by Anne of Austria, to inquire as to the particular convent she would like to select for her future safe custody.

" A Franciscan convent ", was the reply. Anne of Austria had her informed that the question of a convent for men did not arise, and that she had herself assigned her to the " Filles Repenties " (" The Repentant Maidens "). " I have never repented, and I haven't been a maiden for ages ", was Ninon's retort. This flash of wit, which was reported to the Queen, saved her for the moment from prison. But such respite from the royal severity did not last long ; for we find that, when Christina of Sweden came, in 1656, for the first time to Paris, she visited Ninon at the Madelonnettes, where she was then a prisoner.

This interview between the Queen of Sweden and Ninon de Lenclos is one of the most interesting of those times ; for in it the two women, both of the highest culture, passed their contemporaries in review. And it was then that Ninon expressed her well-known opinions as to the views held by the *Précieuses* on the subject of love. No one in Paris was more impressed by Mademoiselle de Lenclos than Christina of Sweden. " I did not meet a woman in France ", she declared, " who pleased me so much as the celebrated Ninon ". And it

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was due to the measures taken by the Swedish Queen that Ninon recovered her liberty.

However, our hedonistic friend, did, once in her life, fall seriously in love—and a Monsieur de Villarceaux was the fortunate object of her affection. Indeed, she had for him so real a passion that, for his sake, she gave up Paris, friends, salon, habits, tastes—in fact everything. She buried herself in the country with him, and lived there in seclusion for three long years. During this retreat two sons were born to her; and when, at the call of their friends, the two lovers finally returned to Paris, their love for one another had in no way abated. Monsieur de Villarceaux took up his residence in a house immediately opposite to Ninon's, so as to be able to see her at any moment of the day. And, one night, it happened that he perceived her lights were burning to a very late hour. At this sight his grief and fears became so extreme that he lost all control over his actions, and he rushed across to his innamorata, with a china article on his head in place of a hat. He found her quietly reading a romance. But, in spite of this evidence, his agitation did not subside; and, when he had gone back, the extremity of his distress brought on a feverish attack. He sent his valet across to Ninon with the news; and she, ransacking her brain for a cure, decided to sacrifice her superb hair, which she immediately cut off and sent over to him by the same valet. The effect upon Villarceaux, it is said, was instantaneous. Before such a sublime proof of love, all doubt disappearing, his temperature at once fell to normal.

However, this same Villarceaux, who alone had been capable of holding Ninon's fidelity, and who for years had believed that there was no other woman in the world fit to stand beside her, one day left her—he had been subjugated by the distinction, modesty, wisdom, and reserved charm of a young woman of whom Parisian society had known but little till the day she became the wife of Scarron<sup>1</sup>, the paralysed poet. Did the youthful Madame Scarron return Monsieur de Villarceaux's love? It is not at all likely. Did not Ninon herself say, in reference to Madame Scarron, when in the depths of her own mortification: "I believe her to be too gauche for love"—and, if Ninon made a mistake in the use of the

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Madame de Maintenon. See page 305.

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epithet "gauche", there is good reason to believe that she made no mistake regarding the fact. The two women, however, who had been friends up till then, owing to Ninon's old friendship with Scarron, did not quarrel about it the less ; but Monsieur de Villarceaux continued in the pursuit of his new fancy, without any desire to remember his past love.

Then Ninon returned to her own particular line in love ; and it was after this manner that for some time she loved Charles de Sévigné, with whose father she had also been on intimate terms. Madame de Sévigné was not altogether distressed about the liaison. "I prefer for Charles the maternal love of Mademoiselle de Lenclos", she said, "to the theatrical business of that Champmeslé woman, my son had *déracinée*<sup>1</sup>". However, their love was of short duration ; for Ninon discovered that Charles was never intended for love, "having a heart like a pumpkin, fricasseed in milk". It has been stated that Ninon even had hours of poignant drama in her life ; the story going, that one of her sons—the elder of the two she had had by Villarceaux—the Chevalier de Villiers, not knowing the relationship that existed between himself and Ninon, fell in love with her, and then killed himself, after having heard the truth from the lips of his own mother. Not a scrap of evidence exists in support of this story ; and we are at liberty to believe that it is a sheer invention, perpetuated with the sole intention of increasing the interest that Ninon's personality excites.

We prefer very much more to be told that she continued to attract admiration late on in her life, and that she was sixty-seven when the Abbé de Chateauneuf laid his heart at her feet. Still, as always, young and gay in spirit, Ninon replied : "My dear Abbé, I will accept the offer of your heart on my seventieth birthday"—and the Abbé, ever faithful and with exemplary patience, awaited the coming of the happy day when his hopes would be fulfilled. But perhaps even the Abbé de Chateauneuf was not the last to be loved by Ninon. There is a possibility that the Abbé Gédoyne has had the right to make love to this incorrigible epicurean, when she was eighty years old. Saint-Evremond had had good reason to write to

<sup>1</sup> *Déracinée*. This is a pun on the name of Racine, the poet, who was the lover of Champmeslé till Charles de Sévigné supplanted him.—*Trans.*

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her some years before : " You are always attractive, Ninon, because you have the charm and manner of a young girl." Therein lay the secret of Ninon's prolonged youthfulness. It is not to be supposed that Ninon, as a matter of fact, remained physically beautiful up to the day of her death, the 17th of October, 1705, when she had reached eighty-five. Voltaire, to whom she left by will a small sum for the purchase of books and who saw her some months before she died, writes that he found her yellow, and with a skin like parchment. The years touched Ninon as they touch us all, though perhaps more gently ; but the wit, vivacity, optimism, smile, and charm remained up to the end, just as they had been when she was twenty. And that was why, when a very old woman, she still seemed young.

One cannot leave Ninon, without referring shortly to *La Coquette Vengée*, which she wrote in reply to the author—now unknown—of a *Portrait de la Coquette*. This phantasy of Ninon's is an absolute chef-d'œuvre of malice and charm. In it, she makes an aunt advise her niece especially to avoid philosophers, who, under the guise of wisdom, are capable of perpetrating the worst villainies.

Very attractive also are the letters which Ninon wrote to Saint-Evremond. None of her contemporaries knew her so well as Saint-Evremond. Their minds were in harmony ; their tastes the same ; and they liked discussing the same subjects. So the letters which they exchanged after Saint-Evremond departed for London give a presentment of their inner and outer lives, related in a most witty and intimate way. To everything that she touched or wrote Ninon communicated her spirits, good humour, and charm.

Is it then astonishing, when we take into consideration all her qualities, gifts, wit, and charm, that both her contemporaries and posterity have been indulgent towards her ? We are not surprised to find the Princesse Palatine wanting to send her son to her house for lessons in deportment ; or to discover in her salon the Maréchal de Chéqui, the Duchesse de la Feuillade, the Duchesse de Bouillon, Madame de la Sablière, Madame de Coulanges, Madame de Cornuel, Lady Sandwich, and all the rest ! We can even understand how—carried away by a chivalrous respect for the virtues "*d'honnête homme*" of



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this pretty woman—the great Condé caused his carriage to be stopped, to allow him to salute her ; and how it came about that Molière, Boileau, the Duc de Rochefoucauld—in fact everyone in the world of letters—were to be found amongst her friends.

Ninon viewed the approach of death with courage and serenity. “ What more is there for me to do, here ? ” she asked of those who were weeping round her. The absence of fear in her last hour, the radiance of her beauty, love, and wit that poured forth throughout her life, and the real virtues which she certainly possessed, give justification to Saint-Evremond’s lines,

“ With wise, yet indulgent concern,  
Did Nature conceive Ninon’s heart.  
Epicurus did teach it to burn,  
But Cato did virtue impart.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “ *L’indulgente et sage Nature  
A formé le cœur de Ninon  
De la volupté d’Épicure  
Et de la vertu de Caton.* ”

## MARTHE DU VIGEAN COUSIN OF THE GRAND CONDÉ

[1622-1665]

Among the young and pretty *Précieuses* who were the delight of the delicate and refined fêtes, which were given at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, the Hôtel de Condé, at Chantilly, Liancourt, Rueil, and La Barre, there was one who stood out from among the rest as being perhaps sweeter, more modest, and more attractive in her gentle chastity and charm—and that was Marthe du Vigeon. Beautiful as “the Dawn”, according to Voiture, she was quite unconscious of it, and appeared to have no realization of the fact that hers was a personality of surpassing allurements. Her family were related to the Condés, but ranked socially on a different level. For the Condés, as Princes of the Blood, came immediately after the King, whilst Monsieur du Vigeon was merely a Baron: and, though at times he entertained Princes in his sumptuous domain of La Barre, it was due solely to his immense wealth and the accident which had allied his family to that of the Condés. In spite of this marked social disparity, the tie of relationship which connected the two families brought their children into early association. When quite young, the Duc d’Enghien was accustomed to regard Marthe as his dear little sister; and Marthe, from the age of three, looked up to the Duc d’Enghien as a big brother whom she greatly loved.

But as Marthe grew up, so did her charms increase; and there came a time, when she was likened to “the Rising Sun”, or to “a Rosebud about to open”. The emblem designed for her was a lighted torch, surrounded by a cloud of moths, and bearing the words: “I charm—but I burn”. And the device was true; for all who came into contact with Marthe loved her, while she herself passed on, in her beauty and indifference, oblivious to the fact that even a *Précieuse* can be brought to suffering, through the agency of love.

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But one day, in the spring-time of 1640, when Monsieur and Madame du Vigean were entertaining their friends at La Barre in the splendid manner for which the house was famed, the Duc d'Enghien, while dancing with Marthe, realized that his feelings towards her had undergone a change. The friendship and esteem with which he had always regarded her had developed into an emotion such as could not be mistaken. He suddenly experienced a desire to insult, or even to slay, certain young lords whom he detected staring at Marthe. There was no doubt about it—he, also, had fallen beneath the sweet fascination of Marthe du Vigean, and knew that he loved her.

But the Duke, if he loved, meant to be loved in return. He did not intend to take his place among the disregarded butterflies who were scorching their wings without the slightest attention being paid to their sufferings. So he spoke to Marthe that same evening ; and to his great joy the girl's heart responded to the rapture of his own. She even avowed to him—despite the fact of her being a *Précieuse*—that she had loved him from the very first.

But, though freely admitting her love for him, it was impossible for her to conceal her secret distress and fears. She reminded him how greatly different was the position of their families, and how intense would be the opposition of Monsieur le Prince de Condé and of Madame la Princesse—especially the former, whose ambition, in regard to the future of his family, was so well known. Indeed, during this first interchange of views, he arrived at an exact realization of the whole strength and virtue of his cousin's nature, and understood that hers was a love, deep-seated and indelible—but that it had for its key-note an intrinsic purity.

The Duke therefore realized that he would either have to love Marthe as Petrarch loved his Laura, or succeed in overcoming the obstacles which lay in the way of their marriage. On that particular evening, Enghien did not doubt for an instant that everything would run smoothly in accordance with their wishes and to the triumph of their love. For he was but nineteen, and she was seventeen—and has not Hope always been the handmaid of Youth ? Moreover, the Duke's ardent eyes were speaking such volumes that the uneasiness of Marthe du Vigean was allayed.

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In addition to these two ardent eyes, the Duke possessed an extremely aquiline nose, with slightly projecting teeth, and an abundance of hair, which was always in disorder. Such features gave to his face something of the profile of an eagle ; but its expression was one of force and nobility. He was well made, and, when dressed in his finery, cut a splendid figure.

It is easy to picture the love of these young people, the joy that they took in confessing the same to one another, and the happiness that their hopes brought to them. But, while they thus indulged in these happy dreams, an event, as unexpected as it was painful, occurred, that entirely upset their plans for the future. The Duc d'Enghien's father, the Prince de Condé, had always been mindful with regard to the fortunes and influence of his family. And it was on that account when so many of the nobles had conspired against the Minister—the superb Cardinal Richelieu—who was striving to reduce them to obedience, that Condé, on the contrary, had many times offered him his assistance. So, in 1641, Richelieu suggested a matrimonial alliance between his own family and that of the first Prince of the Blood. Condé was delighted to lend an ear to such a proposition. Richelieu's idea was that his niece, the young Claire-Clémence Maillé de Brézé, should marry Condé's elder son, that same Duc d'Enghien who was now so enamoured of Marthe du Vigeon.

The Prince de Condé had always strongly disapproved of his son's regard for Mademoiselle du Vigeon ; and several times he had sent him away from Paris, with the sole aim of removing him from the young girl's influence. He had certainly no intention of allowing such feeling on the part of the Duke for Marthe to stand in the way of his cordially agreeing to the Cardinal's suggestion. Richelieu expressed his intention of giving an immense fortune to his niece on her marriage, and promised his friendship to the young husband. The Duc d'Enghien, however, on being informed of the project arranged between his father and the Minister, vehemently protested. He entreated that his liberty of choice in respect to the act upon which the whole happiness of his life depended should be respected. And, after having tried protests and prayers, he employed threats, declaring that, if this marriage were to be insisted upon, he would cease to interest himself in the family-

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fortunes, would remain a stranger to the Duchess, and would utterly refuse to live with her.

It was all useless. The King, the Cardinal, and the Prince formally gave their orders—and before these three authorities the Duke could do nothing save obey. But, confronted by this outrage to his feelings, he hastened to Mademoiselle du Vigeon to assure her, that he would never love anyone but her, that Mademoiselle de Maillé Brézé would be a wife to him only in name, and that, immediately he became his own master, he would repudiate her and would make Marthe his wife and Duchess. Marthe du Vigeon, her heart overflowing with the fulness of her love, implicitly accepted all he said, and the two continued to live amid their dreams and future hopes.

However, the little Duchess elect, was charming. Extremely pleasing in face and figure, through having lived in the provinces, she had not been instructed in the *style précieux*; but she had brought with her an originality all her own, and her manner was both lively and appealing. In her ingenuous enthusiasm, she asked for nothing more than to be allowed to see and admire everything in Paris, the very name of which had always fascinated her. She was, indeed, prepared to love anyone who was passably kind to her.

It was at a Court ball that the Duc d'Enghien saw her for the first time. She looked even younger than she was, though she was barely fifteen. Her artless admiration towards everything around her produced a feeling that she was nothing but a child; and the simple way in which she smiled at the Duke—merely because he seemed to her so nice and smart—only increased this initial impression. The Duke, who was determined in advance to condemn everything connected with her, considered her badly brought up and silly; and these were the only feelings he had in respect to Mademoiselle de Maillé Brézé when the wedding-day arrived.

The marriage was celebrated with inconceivable splendour. Richelieu, who had at last brought his family to the very steps of the Throne, had determined that the ceremony should be of a character such as would impress itself on the memories of his contemporaries. Monsieur le Prince would have considered it altogether unworthy of his family, had not the ceremony produced an atmosphere of pomp and magnificence. And,

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amid those gorgeous surroundings, the hearts of the young couple alone were sad. Claire-Clémence had realized that her husband had not wanted to marry her; and the Duc d'Enghien was suffering both for Marthe and for himself. He yearned to prove to the one, whom he loved, how, from the very day of his marriage, he was going to work towards the realization of their plan. And that is why, on that very same day, he made protest against the coercion to which he had been subjected, and recorded such protest in a notarial document that bristled with legal formalities. But so great a constraint had been too fierce a trial for the impatient and excitable character of the Duc d'Enghien. This marriage, which had separated him for a time from Marthe du Vigean, upset him so entirely that he became seriously ill. He had barely entered on his convalescence, when he learned that the campaign against the Spaniards was about to open. That rival passion of his—the pursuit of glory—re-awoke to life: his illness was forgotten, and he thought of nothing save his duty to fight for France. His family, beside themselves at the idea of his going in his weakened condition, begged and entreated that he should not be permitted to do so; and the King issued the necessary order. But the Duke was enabled to assure his Sovereign that he was indeed strong enough to go. Marthe came and shed her tears, and pleaded with him to stay. The Duke experienced the greatest difficulty in bidding her farewell. Nevertheless, he went.

He went—and he went to gain the resounding victory of Rocroi (1643), which put the Spaniards to flight, inaugurated in a most glorious manner the reign of the young King, Louis XIV, and helped to consolidate the Throne, which a long minority might have shaken. The Duc d'Enghien, preceded by the fame of his triumph, returned to Paris, in a blaze of glory.

On the day after his return, he hastened to Marthe du Vigean, to assure her once again of the force and steadfastness of his love, and to lavish on her marks of his affection, at once ardent and respectful. The outcome of their efforts was now full of promise—for Richelieu had died in 1642, and Monsieur le Prince could no longer use the same severity towards the Victor of Rocroi as he had done when he had coerced him into

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marriage. The young couple then had reason to believe that their hopes would shortly come to fruition. As at that time *galanterie de bon ton* was all the fashion, the fact of their attachment was known to everyone, and the great ladies of the Court were according them their sympathy, and the Duke and Marthe no longer attempted to conceal their love. At every fête they attended, they were to be seen strolling for hours together, loitering about the flowered paths, or sitting under the great centenarian trees—always in a *solitude-à-deux*.

One day, at Chantilly, when they were thus walking together, Marthe suddenly disengaged herself from the Duke's arm, on which she had been leaning, and moved towards a small bright spot she saw among the dying leaves. It proved to be a small tin crucifix gleaming faintly in the rays of the autumn sun. Marthe, picking it up, kissed it sadly, and placed it in her bosom. When the Duke, who had been watching her movements, looked at her, he saw two large tear-drops trembling in her eyes. "Why are you crying?" he asked. "Because", she answered, "this crucifix has been sent to speak to me of sacrifice and renunciation".

In the meantime, the young Duchesse d'Enghien fell ill; and the lovers foresaw the possibility of a natural solution of their troubles. But Claire-Clémence recovered; and, unfortunately for the Duke, her conduct towards him, and in respect to everything, was irreproachable—thus making the question of repudiation still more difficult.

Then Marthe du Vigean, fearing that the existent situation would now be obviously prolonged, begged the Duke, with the view of diverting attention from their own intimacy, to pretend that he had fallen in love with Mademoiselle de Bouteville. Through her mother, this young lady was also a cousin of the Duke's, a superb-looking girl and the elder daughter of that unfortunate Montmorency Bouteville who had been beheaded by order of Richelieu. Solely with the object of pleasing Marthe, the Duke assented; but he played his part so well in regard to Mademoiselle de Bouteville that Mademoiselle du Vigean took fright, and had to employ a much greater warmth in forbidding the Duke to speak to Mademoiselle de Bouteville than in the first instance she had needed to induce him to pay his court to her. The Duke,

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however, completely satisfied Marthe by not only ceasing his attentions, but by kidnapping Mademoiselle de Bouteville in the interest of his friend Andelot de Châtillon. The actual perpetration of the abduction was most dramatic. Enghien had to exercise all his cunning and courage, and a Swiss soldier was actually killed in the mêlée that ensued. But the Duke carried the matter through—not only capturing the lady, but succeeding in concealing all traces of her whereabouts by installing her with Andelot de Châtillon in one of his own villas. And it was only after the two families concerned had discovered that the young couple had been living there together for several weeks that they consented to the marriage.

The Duc d'Enghien had certainly displayed a most remarkable energy in the interests of his friend; but the truth was, he had cause to believe that Madame du Vigean was seriously entertaining the idea of suggesting Châtillon as a husband for Marthe. Eligible aspirants were crowding round the young girl; and Madame du Vigean, alive to the fact that the prospect of the repudiation of the Duke's marriage was becoming more and more remote, was daily impressing on her child, with ever increasing firmness, that she would have to make choice of another husband. But Marthe's love remained unshaken.

However, subsequent events were well calculated to discourage her constancy. In addition to the Duke's marriage, which separated her from the man she loved, there now came the birth of his son. For, in spite of all that the Duke had promised, his wife had become the mother of his child. And the child, heir presumptive to his mother's immense fortune and to the estates of the Condés, was, on the 12th December, 1643, solemnly held by Mazarin—who had succeeded to the power of Richelieu—and the Princesse de Condé at the baptismal font. He received in baptism the name of Henri, Jules de Bourbon.

The Duc d'Enghien refused to be present at the ceremony. Whilst his son was being baptized, he was with Marthe du Vigean, cursing his luck, and imploring her to come away with him. But Marthe's virtue was no more to be shaken than her love. During his three years of courtship, the Duke



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had never been favoured beyond the permission to kiss her hand.

However, after the birth of the little Henri Jules, the Queen, Anne of Austria, made formal declaration that she would never agree to the annulment of a union which God had blessed. It was in vain that the husband pledged himself by legal document, drawn out in his own name and in that of his son, to renounce the immense heritage from Richelieu ; and it was equally in vain that, after his great victory of Nordlingen (1645), he appealed to the eminent services which he had rendered to the Throne of France, to procure for him the only thing in life which could bring him happiness. The Court would not rescind its expressed resolve. Then the Duke became seriously ill ; and in his delirium he called incessantly for Marthe du Vigean. But, when a long and painful convalescence had finally brought him to his senses, the Duc d'Enghien understood, once and for all, that he would never be able to get his marriage dissolved. And he knew also that he would never be able to overcome the virtuous scruples of Marthe du Vigean. So, crushed under the weight of a passion that had been consuming him for the past six years and which he fully realized now could never be satisfied, the Duke, worn-out with so much futile struggling and terrified before the thought of having to endure a continuance of such suffering as had been his lot—sought his cure in another love.

Mademoiselle du Vigean received his farewell at the same time as his confession. She uttered no word of complaint, nor did she weep. But, before such sorrow as was hers, the Christian spirit within her developed strongly, and Marthe, forsaken, told herself that God had stricken her because she had sinned in having attempted to take a husband from his wife. Her soul was flooded with a sense of repentance, and she desired to retire from the world, and to expiate her fault in the austerities of the Carmel. But her family refused their consent, and Madame du Vigean brought more energy than ever into the matter of her marrying. The eligible aspirants again appeared, and she was ordered to make her choice from among them. But Marthe persisted in her sweet, but firm, refusal.

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One day, when her mother was in the country and her sister thought she was calling on some friends, Marthe escaped from the luxurious home of her parents and went, in the full bloom of her youth and beauty, to immure herself in the Carmelite Convent of the Rue Saint-Jacques. She was only twenty-three at the time; and, throughout all the years she had before her, Marthe was to seek expiation for those six years of a love that had given her naught save hopes, and fears, and despair. The entry of Mademoiselle du Vigeon into the Carmel created a great sensation in the Court and the Town. Everyone expressed surprise that this pretty young *précieuse*, who had been so fond of life, could have shown such courage.

And she did not escape the song-writers :

" When La Vigeon quitted the Court  
Lightness, and Love, and Grace,  
Took to Flight, and a convent sought,  
Where Beauty, setting the world at nought,  
Carefully veiled her face." <sup>1</sup>

But she was, then, dead to the sounds of the world. She made her profession in 1649, taking the name of Sister Marthe de Jésus; and it was before the Christ that the poor, forsaken girl shed the tears which she had hidden from her beloved. But it was by her modesty and humility that Sister Marthe de Jésus especially impressed her associates. She never wrote a letter without concluding it with the words "*Carmélite indigne*".

The Duc d'Enghien, who had succeeded to the Condé title on the death of his father in 1646, never attempted to see Sister Marthe de Jésus. But a very tender remembrance of her always remained in a corner of his heart; and in the coming by-and-by, did anyone ask of him a favour, the applicant was certain to obtain it, were the Duke only reminded that he had once been among the friends or acquaintances of Marthe du Vigeon.

In the meantime, at the Carmel, the austerity of the rule, the strict confinement, and possibly the memories of the

<sup>1</sup> "*Lorsque Vigeon quitta la Cour,  
Les jeux, les grâces, les amours  
Entrèrent dans le monastère ;  
Ce jour-là la beauté se voila,  
Et fit vœu d'être solitaire.*"

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past, gradually undermined the health of Sister Marthe de Jésus. And there came a day when she was compelled to recognize that her chest was seriously affected ; and at the beginning of April, 1665, she had spasms of suffocation of such a nature that the Sisters thought that they were going to lose her. She lived, however, till the 25th of that month.

It is related that, on that self-same day, the nurse-in-charge having for a moment left the cell, Sister Marthe crawled out of her little bed, and dragged herself across the room to a press made of white wood, which was one of the few articles of furniture in her cell, and that she took out of it a little bag that was hidden at the bottom, and returned with it to her bed. The bag contained a portrait of Enghien, and the small tin crucifix, which Marthe, one autumn day, had found among the dying leaves at Chantilly.

When the nun returned, she found that the sick woman was evidently worse. Her eyes were growing dim, presaging the peace to come. In fact, a few hours later Sister Marthe had fallen asleep in Christ, after having received the last sacraments.

She was forty-three years old, of which she had passed twenty at the Carmel.

## MARIE MANCINI

[1640-1707] and

LOUIS XIV

[1638-1715]

Never has the old adage "Fortune favours the brave" been better justified than in the case of Mazarin and his family. Son of a simple *Intendant* of the household of the Italian Prince Colonna, Jules Mazarin, solely by his own wits, succeeded in making himself the all-powerful master of the Kingdom of France, andmorganatic husband of the widow of Louis XIII. But, what is more remarkable still, is the fact that in his dizzy ascent he carried with him the children of his two sisters—the Martinozzi and the Mancini. Not only were his six nieces celebrated throughout Europe for their beauty, but they all of them married into the noblest families of the day, and several of them played a political rôle of a by no means negligible order.

Marie Mancini, in her early years, was not one of the most favoured of Mazarin's nieces. She was born at Rome in 1640, and her mother, early realizing that her fate was to be plain, did not entertain any particular affection for the child. When seven years old, she was placed in the convent of Campo-Marzio, with the purpose of educating her to the idea of being a nun. In Madame Mancini's opinion, a woman without beauty had little hope of success in the world ; and that, therefore, the wisest thing for her to do was to make no attempt to enter it. But nature upset Madame Mancini's plans. The little Marie, as a consequence of her frail and delicate health, was sent back to her mother, after a two-years' sojourn at Campo-Marzio. It was a profound vexation to Madame Mancini, in so much so that, when two years later her brother Cardinal Mazarin summoned her to France with all her family, she harked back to the idea of making

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Marie a nun, and to this purpose considered the question of leaving her behind at Rome. Marie, however, manifested no vocation whatever for the religious life, and her mother, perforce, had to take her with her. They all landed at Marseilles, in May, 1653; and, after a few weeks devoted to visiting relations and friends, they settled down as near as possible to the Court.

Marie did not prove attractive either to Anne of Austria, her uncle, or the Court circle generally. They considered her plain and uninteresting. Her little elfin face seemed all eyes; and she seldom smiled. So, immediately after the coronation of Louis XIV, Marie, whose health had now improved, was again despatched to a convent. They chose, on this occasion, the Convent of La Visitation in the Rue Saint-Jacques, whose Superior was Marie-Elizabeth de Lamoignon, a woman of stern and rigid views but of exceptional education and high intelligence. Marie Mancini was entrusted to the care of this lady on the 1st of April, 1656. But even Madame de Lamoignon's strong will, practical attitude, and enlightened understanding were powerless to awaken in Marie Mancini the slightest inclination towards a religious vocation. Evidently the life of the cloister presented no attractions whatsoever to this particular niece of Mazarin; and it was with a sense of absolute joy that she turned her back on the convent for the last time.

However, the life which Marie was about to lead in the social world did not offer any particular attraction. Her function now was to be with her mother, whose very delicate health necessitated unceasing attentions, such as Madame Mancini expected to receive at her daughter's hands. The months which the mother and daughter thus passed together were certainly neither gay nor pleasing to Marie Mancini. She was fully occupied in looking after her charge, and the latter evinced no gratitude. Madame Mancini continued to regard her as the least-gifted of her five girls, and held her personally responsible for the way Fate had dealt with her. Marie took refuge from her mother's unjustness in reading, and in a careful attention to the sick woman's requirements. Her intelligence was exceptional, and she took the keenest



MARIE MANCINI  
(A Niece of Cardinal Mazarin's), Connétable Colonna



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interest in everything. That she was the most cultured of all the Mancini girls admits of no question.

However, as it turned out, it was owing to this very devotion and care which she was giving to her sick mother that Fortune smiled on her; for it happened to attract the attention of the young King, Louis XIV. Mazarin conducted the whole business of the Government, while Louis was expected merely to take his orders from his mother and the Cardinal; and, did he venture to depart from the line of conduct prescribed, things became somewhat complicated at the Court, and in no way to the advantage of the King himself. This was most noticeable on the occasion when the young man ventured "to speak, as a man" to Mademoiselle de la Motte Argencourt, maid-of-honour to the Queen. Louis XIV had been compelled to make immediate confession in his mother's oratory, and Mademoiselle de la Motte Argencourt had been dismissed from the Court. The King, in fact, had been deprived of both authority and diversion. There had been a short period, it is true, when the advances and enticements of Olympe Mancini had amused him. But Olympe had lately married the Comte de Soissons, and Louis XIV had relapsed into his original condition of isolation and inaction. Having nothing whatever to do, it became a matter of mild interest to him to note the filial devotion of Mademoiselle Mancini, to mark the unruffled good-humour with which she met the rebukes of the sick woman, and to realize the skill underlying all her attentions. Such visits had only been very occasional; but, as time passed, they became more frequent; and the King was not long in discovering that the young girl could talk quite as well as she could nurse. In fact, her conversation, bright and witty as it was, began to interest him in a very marked degree.

When at length Madame Mancini died, on the 19th of December, 1656, Marie was no longer a matter of indifference to the King; and the idea of seeing her less often was quite painful to him. And so he began to visit Olympe much more frequently; not exactly for the purpose of seeing the Countess—though she flattered herself that such was the case—but in order to meet Marie at her house. Madame de Venel had



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about this time been appointed *gouvernante* to the three unmarried nieces of Mazarin, Marie, Hortense, and Anne-Marie, and showed herself by no means unsympathetic to the growing intimacy between the Sovereign and the young girl. Her pliant and artful character, sharp-witted intelligence, and love of gain plainly pointed out to her the advantages that might accrue to her from assisting the young couple's romance—and she did not scruple to do it. Louis XIV first spoke of his love to Marie Mancini when they were both proceeding to Fontainebleau; and in making such declaration, he practically made his first move towards emancipating himself from the tutelage of Anne of Austria and Mazarin.

Marie Mancini was then seventeen. She was no longer the little girl whose appearance had so displeased her mother. Unquestionably, her good looks were not of that regular and assured order, such as creates general admiration. Indeed some have gone so far as to maintain that even at this time she was still plain. But such an opinion could have been expressed only by people who instinctively dislike originality of appearance, and who fail to appreciate in the study of physiognomy the value that can be given to the face by intelligence and expression. The eyes of Marie Mancini were superb—large, admirably shaped, and intensely dark—lighting up her face, and shining with intelligence. The effect of her eyes was all the more striking owing to the pallor of her skin and the smallness of her face. She had admirable teeth, and her face was remarkably mobile—passing, as it were, in a moment from the playful to the passionate; and its usual characteristic was a look of archness, emphasized by a smile of enigmatical significance. And this piquant and original countenance was crowned with a wealth of jet-black hair. Her whole personality was attractive and disturbing; but to Louis XIV the disturbing factor seemed merely original. Every day that passed, this boy-King, who had yet to become acquainted with the actualities of love, felt himself more and more drawn to the physical and intellectual attributes with which Mazarin's niece had been so liberally endowed. In fact, to such a degree was this the case that La Grande Mademoiselle relates

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in her *Memoirs* that Christina of Sweden, who was a personal witness of the feelings which united the young couple during her stay in Paris, asked why on earth arrangements were not made for their immediate marriage. However, the love affair did not reach its climax until the following year, 1658. In the meantime, Louis XIV had rejoined his troops in Flanders. Mazarin, desirous of making him in every way popular, had arranged for him to score certain easily managed successes in the war against the Spaniards. All went well at first ; but suddenly the King was stricken down with fever at Calais (30th of June, 1658). The doctors, summoned in haste, pronounced the malady to be pernicious fever. His condition rapidly became very grave ; and the probability of his death was being freely discussed. Anne of Austria was overwhelmed by the magnitude of such a disaster ; but beside her was a heart that experienced a still acuter grief and an even deeper despair—that of Marie Mancini. And, during the space of a fortnight, Marie's grief found no relief. At the end of that time, the entourage of the King, feeling themselves powerless to arrest the malady, decided to call in an Abbeville physician who had already effected marvellous cures in respect of what had been regarded as hopeless cases. Doctor du Saussois—such was his name—hastened to the royal bedside ; and, having examined the patient, immediately ordered a remedy of a drastic nature—an emetic wine, which few physicians of the period dared prescribe. The rashness of the suggestion seemed so palpable that the Court physicians declined to comply without first referring the matter to the Cardinal. But Mazarin, with his usual courage, never hesitated. The emetic wine was administered to Louis ; and a few hours afterwards the King had opened his eyes, was interesting himself in those around him, and was discovering with emotion that Marie Mancini was bathed in tears on his account. No sight could have been more pleasing to the young King. Not only was Marie to him the sweetest of companions, the dearest of friends, the most cultured woman of the Court, the most brilliant conversationist, and the most utterly charming person in the world—but, in addition to all of this, it was now self-evident that she was dying with love for the King !

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Louis fully determined that his love for her should be of a similar quality ; and from that day a deep and ardent passion bound them to one another.

Indiscretion, or rather legitimate curiosity in respect to historical fact, asks the question whether the great love on the part of Marie Mancini was altogether disinterested. It is scarcely probable. Life, in the first instance, had been hard for this poor child, whose only offence had been that she had not been so pretty as her sisters. Then, in order to escape from a convent which she detested, she had been compelled to put forth her strength, and the struggle had developed in her a desire for success and ascendancy, which increased with years. She, whose original ambition had merely been to get permission to live in the social world, had finally reached a point when she desired to live in it in the most agreeable manner possible. And when circumstances brought a King to her feet, naturally she saw no reason why she should not aim at becoming his Queen, particularly when she loved him as much as he loved her. Her ambition and love thus running on parallel lines, what possible reason could exist to prevent her from pursuing the two passions at one and the same time ? And, that being so, Marie Mancini, though absolutely sincere in her affection for the King, never forgot in her relations with him that she was playing for a throne. She regulated her conduct in accordance with this ambition, and thus encouraged the King to believe that he could not have made a wiser choice. But she was also a woman of keen intelligence, who took every care to remove obstacles as they arose. Had any woman—other than a Princess—appeared to compete with her for Louis' hand, there is no manner of doubt that Marie would have carried off the prize.

However, for the moment, Louis XIV, now fully restored to health, was content to bask in the sunshine of his love for Mazarin's niece. He could not bear to have her out of his sight. Every day she became dearer and more indispensable. He was subjugated by the flash of her eyes, carried away by her natural daring, and governed by her strong will. Finally there came a day when, madly in love with Marie, who declined to vouchsafe to him so much as a platonic

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kiss, Louis XIV went to Anne of Austria and begged her to allow him to marry her. The Queen Mother, whose temper was always violent and tempestuous, became furious. She declared to her son that never would she consent to such a union. She threw in his face all the care she had taken of his kingdom and interests, overwhelmed him with a detailed list of his ingratitude, and proved to him the utter futility of all that she had done, should such a marriage take place. But Louis persisted in his resolve; and, vanquished by his mother, he went on to the Cardinal. Marie knew how to feed the flame of his love. He hoped that the uncle of his beloved would prove himself accessible to the ambitious aspiration of one of his own family. And Mazarin did hesitate perceptibly. It would have been a splendid triumph to have had one of his nieces Queen of France. But the political genius of the man soon got the better of the tender and ambitious uncle—and he recognized that the King of France could not marry his niece. Politically, it would be a calamity for France; and, personally, an unwarrantable degradation for the King. Louis XIV had to make a great marriage. The glory of France and that of the reign depended on it. And, reasoning thus, Mazarin became as inexorable as Anne of Austria. The young couple were in despair. They wept and threatened—but that did not advance the matter one iota.

The Cardinal, however, decided that the time had certainly arrived for him to give serious attention to the question of the King's marriage. The present crisis had made it manifest to him that, the sooner that great event was brought about, the better would it be for all parties concerned. Delay was certainly dangerous—the possibility of the King deciding to slip his chains could not be ignored. For some time past, Mazarin had had half-formed plans in regard to the King's marriage; and, in concert with the Queen-Mother, he had fixed his choice on the Infanta of Spain. But Spain, who was also most anxious for the marriage, was astutely waiting for France to make the formal request, arguing that in such case the Princess' dowry would necessarily be considerably smaller. Mazarin, however, divined the Spanish ruse; and, with the purpose of outwitting it, concocted a different project of

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marriage altogether. The hand of Marguerite of Savoy was solicited for Louis XIV ; and with the object of bringing the matter to a head, the Court, with its young King, set out for Lyons. Louis, more enamoured than ever with Marie Mancini, refused to start without her. So it was decided that Marie was to be of the party. But her position was not the same as that of Mademoiselle de Montpensier and of the other great ladies of the Court composing the escort of the King, for she became the Queen of the royal progress. It was at the door of her carriage that the King rode for the greater portion of the time. In the evenings he improvised dances, and invented all sorts of games for her amusement. They took supper together, and spent hours in long conversations, talking chiefly about love. It almost looked as though the whole journey had been contrived solely for the glorification of Marie Mancini, and the young girl made every effort to prolong the time of the march to Lyons. However, on the 28th November, 1658, they reached that town ; and on the following 2nd of December Marguerite of Savoy, with her mother the Princess of Savoy, arrived to salute the King of France and the Queen-Mother, Anne of Austria.

The effect produced by the young Princess was unsatisfactory, though her mother made a pleasing impression. Marguerite was ugly, with an ill-shaped face, red hair, and heavy expression—and her general attitude was stiff and unbending. Louis, however, in spite of this, confessed to himself that it would be very pleasant to be married, and to possess a wife. But Marie Mancini was most indignant that the King did not protest against such a marriage. According to Mademoiselle de Montpensier, she called out : " Are you not ashamed to think that they want you to marry a woman as ugly as that ? " And, in addition, she lost no opportunity in pointing out to the King anything of a disparaging nature in respect to the Heiress of Savoy. Thus she slyly contrived that he should see Marguerite in the act of painting her face, at a moment when the Princess had every right to have considered herself safe from prying eyes.

Possibly facts of this description would have induced Louis XIV to share Marie Mancini's views of the Savoyard marriage, had events only given him the time. But, as early

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as the month of January, 1659, a Spanish Ambassador arrived, offering to Mazarin the hand of the Infanta Marie-Thérèse for Louis XIV. The able Minister's diplomatic manoeuvre had succeeded, and there was joy in his heart, as he broke off the marriage negotiations with the House of Savoy. At the beginning of February, the Court left Lyons on its return journey; and again Marie Mancini was fêted and glorified by Louis XIV. Balls, suppers, royal rides by the carriage door—all began over again; and Marie had good reason for renewed hopes. "The gallant adventures accompanying our repasts and promenades would require a whole volume", she has written in her *Souvenirs*. One day, when the King had presented an unexpected gift to every lady of the retinue, he handed a large casket to Madame de Venel, who had accompanied Marie throughout the journey. The lady curtsied very low and thanked the King, imagining she was receiving a valuable present. But, when she opened the casket, she gave a scream of fright, for out jumped two mice. The King's intention, in perpetrating this trick, was to punish Madame de Venel for having during the journey objected to his amorous encroachments on Marie Mancini.

In the meantime, the attitude of the King towards Mazarin's niece had been generally commented on, and a knowledge of it had reached the Spanish Court. With its extreme strictness on all matters pertaining to etiquette and propriety, this Court at once decided to despatch an Ambassador to France, to insist on the King's renunciation of Marie Mancini. The Ambassador selected for the task was Pementel. Whilst he was travelling towards Paris, the Court had re-entered the Capital, and Louis XIV and his beloved were already devising further plans for their amusement. It was at a fête, given by Madame de Lionne at Berg, that Marie Mancini first heard of the requirements of Spain—requirements, at any rate, of which Anne of Austria strongly approved. "If you dance the ballet again during Lent", the Queen-Mother had said, "I shall myself go into retreat at Le Val de Grace". And Mazarin displayed, on this occasion, an unshakable firmness. He was not going to allow Louis XIV to displease Spain at any price. He declared that, since Spain demanded it, the two friends would have to

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separate, and that he himself was going to take his niece away, and locate her somewhere at a distance from the Court. Louis wept bitterly—wept for several days, and purchased at a cost of seventy-eight thousand francs a superb rope of pearls from the exiled Queen of England which he gave to Marie Mancini ; and then, with passionate regret and more wisdom, perhaps, than might have been expected—he let her go (June, 1659).

Marie, who had submitted only with bitterness if not absolute anger, had readily promised Louis XIV to write to him ; and it was this ardent correspondence which sustained the sentiments of this young couple from the end of June, 1659, to April, 1660. At that time Louis XIV, having made up his mind to marry the Infanta Marie-Thérèse, was surcharged with tender melancholy at the thought of Marie Mancini. He wanted to see her again, to know that she was thinking of him, to feel that she loved him always.

At Bordeaux, when he was en route for Spain, he received the ovations of his subjects, delighted to have their King within their walls ; but his one idea was to escape from such popular manifestations, and to steal away and find Marie. Anne of Austria, who was miserable over her son's unhappiness, consented to accompany him to Saint-Jean d'Angély, in Aunis, whither Marie had been exiled. But, as evening approached, she started back for Bordeaux, several hours before her son, thus leaving the two lovers tête-à-tête. Marie had hoped to derive much from this interview. She tried to make the King promise to keep her personality supreme in his heart. But Louis could make no definite promise, though he was clearly intoxicated by his dear one's presence. Mazarin, who had fought with the Spanish Minister, Don Luis de Haro, one of the greatest diplomatic duels in history, heard with anger, fear, and despair of this visit of Louis XIV's to Saint-Jean d'Angély. He wrote to his King : " The only remedy, Sire, that lies in my power, is to retire, and to take away with me the source of the troubles that are now likely to arise ".

This letter plunged Louis XIV into the deepest dejection. He promised not to see Marie Mancini again—but he continued to write to her. And she, disappointed in her hopes, refused to reply. Her silence drove the King to despair, making

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him curse the day on which he had promised Mazarin obedience.

But events moved quickly. The Ministers of France and Spain came to a definite agreement—Mazarin had obtained a dowry of three million francs for Marie-Thérèse, and the maintenance of her claim to the throne of Spain should such dowry not be paid by the death of her father, Philippe IV.

There was nothing left for Louis XIV to do but to resume his triumphal progress towards the Pyrenees, and to marry the Infanta (3rd of June, 1660).<sup>1</sup>

While this splendid dream of Marie Mancini was thus gradually disappearing, she was considering how she could give a lesson to the King, as a set-off against her own deep disappointment ; and it appeared to her that, if she could only marry before he did, she would be in a position to excite his jealousy. And it was to this intent that she returned to Paris at the end of December, 1659, with the hope of marrying Charles of Lorraine. On her return, she held many receptions, and saw as much society as the rigid orders of the Cardinal permitted her to do. But the Lorraine marriage fell through, in consequence of the opposition of the Duke's uncle.

On his side, Louis XIV, also, was disappointed. The education of the new Queen had not been such as to make her a suitable companion for him, or to qualify her to preside over a Court like his. Marie-Thérèse, though sweet and loving, possessed neither ability, fascination, nor distinction. And, within three weeks of their marriage, Louis was bored to death. So, on reaching Bordeaux, on the 28th June, 1660, Louis' heart was assailed by tender memories of Marie Mancini, and of their last interview at Saint-Jean d'Angély ; and, despite Mazarin's protestations, his mother's supplications, and Marie-Thérèse's timid tears, he announced that he would have to go to Aunis. It was a veritable pilgrimage of love. He went to Brouage where Marie had passed so many months of her exile ; he lingered on the sea-shore, which once had been brightened by her presence, and shed tears over the recollection ; and he slept in the room which she had formerly occupied. Marie's brother, Philippe, whom the King had taken with him, wrote to his sister the following day : "The King did not

<sup>1</sup> See the next chapter : *The Marriage of Louis XIV.*



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get to sleep till very late. And he was sighing heavily and continuously—proving how much he loves you ". Mazarin, for the sake of appearances, accompanied the King on this excursion, while the Queens continued their journey towards the Capital. But, despite the presence of the Minister, no political significance whatever attaches to this three days' stop at La Rochelle and Brouage. It was literally nothing but a page out of the Romance of Louis XIV and Marie Mancini.

This romance, however, was now approaching its end. Marie Mancini could not forgive the King for the lack of courage he had shown in respect to the matter of making her his Queen ; and, as a reprisal for his contemptible surrender, she determined that he should be made to suffer in his turn, through her. So, although Louis continued his attentions on his return to the Louvre, and made her the Queen of the fêtes arising out of his marriage, in so much that the Court was practically led by La Mancini, her old attitude towards him was completely changed. His jealousy was aroused by her flirtations and numerous assignations—till a day came when he, who had once hoped to have kept her at the Court as long as he possibly could, insisted on her selecting a husband, being now anxious to get rid of her. Marie said that she would not marry an Italian—yet her final decision was given to the Italian Prince Colonna, Constable of Naples. The marriage took place by proxy in the King's chapel (1661) ; and she left the Court and France on the following day for Italy. She was never again to see the King—and she was never again to play any part in France. But her life was still to run on tempestuous lines. In 1672, having fled from her husband, she courageously embarked in a small fishing-boat, facing a terrific storm at sea. Together with her sister Hortense, they landed on the coast of Provence in such a condition that had it not been for the kindness of Madame de Grignan, they would literally have had no clothes.<sup>1</sup>

But such story has no place in a study of the love-affairs of Marie Mancini and Louis XIV. It is, however, a matter of interest to know that in April, 1707, Marie Mancini, Princess Colonna, died of apoplexy in the cell of a monk, to whom she had gone for the purpose of consulting him on the question of

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *Hortense Mancini*.

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her will. She had left instructions that on her tomb should be inscribed simply the words "Dust and Ashes". Did the clear-sighted Marie Mancini, by this epitaph, desire merely to humble herself before God and man—or had she the intention of symbolizing in these three words the promises and acts of those whom she had loved, and in whom she had placed her trust?



## THE MARRIAGE OF LOUIS XIV

[1660]

Louis XIV was twenty years old on the 16th of September, 1658, and all Europe at the time was discussing the question of his marriage. His kingdom, situated as it was in the middle of Europe, dominated the neighbouring States, both through its position and through its power, which latter had been greatly increased since the Treaties of 1648—and consequently the marriage of this Prince had become a question of great political importance. Spain, in particular, ardently desired to acquire this most brilliant and puissant King as a son-in-law. During a visit which Juan of Austria had paid to Queen Anne of Austria in Paris, he had adroitly called attention to the point. The Queen had been showing him round the portraits of her Spanish relatives, and Don Juan had said moodily: "I see that your niece's portrait is hanging on the right of your son's".

But, in her pride and ambition, Spain desired to give her Infanta to France only after she had been repeatedly petitioned, and under the easiest conditions possible. And Cardinal Mazarin, the astute Italian who was then directing the policy of France with such shrewdness and certainty of touch, immediately grasped the underlying motives that were actuating Spain.<sup>1</sup>

The sharp-sighted policy of Mazarin having thus succeeded, on the 24th of June, 1650, he set out from Paris for the frontier to meet the Spanish Minister, Don Luis de Haro, with whom he had to negotiate the conditions of peace—for Spain had not disarmed in accordance with the terms of the Treaties of 1648—and also the conditions relating to the marriage of Louis XIV and the Infanta Marie-Thérèse.

The retinue of Mazarin, when setting out for Spain, was not

<sup>1</sup> See the preceding chapter: *Marie Mancini and Louis XIV* on the journey of the French Court to Savoy, and the matrimonial ruse of the Cardinal.

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only larger but on a much grander scale than that which had accompanied Louis XIV and Anne of Austria into Savoy. It numbered one-hundred-and-fifty lords and gentlemen, with a similar number of attendants, and, in addition to these, there were one-hundred-and-fifty extra men in livery. The personal guard of the Cardinal comprised one-hundred-and-ten mounted men, and three-hundred foot-soldiers. Twenty-four mules, with richly embroidered saddle-cloths, eight waggons each with six horses, seven carriages, and a quantity of led horses composed this more than princely escort. Mazarin thoroughly realized that, to make an impression on Spain, it was imperative to do things in the grand style ; and to this purpose his characteristic stinginess had to bow before political necessity. And the delicate requirements of the situation greatly increased in number when the Minister arrived at Saint-Jean de Luz. There it was found that meticulous and peculiar points of Spanish etiquette were going to add considerably to the difficulties surrounding the *pourparlers*. Spain insisted that the negotiations would have to be carried through on Spanish soil ; and France could not do otherwise than take up a similar position in respect to its own. So search had to be made for a plot of ground which, though not actually belonging to either, might conceivably be imagined to belong to both. And this was not an easy thing to find. However, after much scrutiny and research they fixed on the little *Île des Faisans*, which lay in the river *Bidasoa* ; and decided that its right bank should be regarded as belonging to France, and similarly its left bank to Spain. A central line was made to mark the exact frontier of the two countries ; and it was arranged that each Minister, surrounded by his respective suite, should sit on his own side of the line and never pass it.

This condition was strictly observed. A building was hastily erected on the *Île des Faisans* ; and it comprised several rooms, the number and size of which were made identical for each nation, with a central room built over the line of demarcation, to be used as the hall for the deliberations. All these rooms were furnished with the greatest luxury by their respective occupants.

But preparations on such a scale had delayed the opening of the Conference till the 13th of August, 1659 ; and the



MARIE THÉRÈSE, INFANTA OF SPAIN  
Wife of Louis XIV



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dexterity displayed by the two diplomats over the preliminaries caused further delays. Mazarin was the more skilful of the two in attack, but Don Luis de Haro had an advantage over him in *riposte*—and the equipoise was so well maintained that the two statesmen used to spend the whole day in defeating one another's proposals and in reposing on the laurels of their reciprocal successes. Such tactics prolonged the debates into November. The last meeting of the Conference, in fact, took place on the 12th of that month; and indeed, tradition states that the two Ministers came to their final decision then, simply because on that day a whale had been captured, near Ciboure; for the gibe of the day was that France and Spain would come to an understanding only when a whale was caught—an event of extreme rarity in those waters.

The Conference of the Île des Faisans stipulated a dowry of three million francs for the Infanta Marie-Thérèse; and further, should these three million francs not have been paid to France before the death of Philippe IV, her father, the Princess' renunciation of the crown of Spain would become null and void. This clause, insisted upon by the astute Cardinal, practically secured the Spanish succession to the descendants of Louis XIV; for Mazarin was well aware that Spain would be incapable of paying this sum in the next few years. Mazarin took great pride in the result of the Conference; and was not at all displeased to be able to inform his generals, especially Turenne, that in ninety-nine days—by means of a simple duel of wits—he had been able to assure to France a greater degree of glory than they had ever done upon the battle-field. However, Don Luis de Haro was just as pleased as Mazarin over the result of the Conference; and, when the contract was finally signed, the two Ministers most cordially embraced, while their Secretaries—de Lionne on Mazarin's side, and Pedro Colonna on the other—hastened to imitate them in a similar display of warmth.

France, not having waited for the actual signing of the contract, had, towards the end of that summer, despatched the Maréchal Duc de Grammont as Ambassador Extraordinary to ask Philippe IV for the hand of his elder daughter for the King of France. He had made a sensational entry into



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Madrid, having realized that the Ambassador of a King, in the rôle of youthful lover, should, on the occasion of his arrival to ask for the Princess' hand, make an impression of impetuosity and fire. So, to this effect, on reaching the Prado gate, he put his horse into a gallop, and, ordering the whole of his suite to do the same, Louis XIV's Ambassador covered the considerable distance between the Prado and the Palais Royal in a wild rush of gaiety and colour. The inhabitants of Madrid went into transports of joy and enthusiasm at the sight of these brilliant young Frenchmen coming thus on the part of their incomparable King, to solicit the hand of their Infanta. After his entry into Madrid, the Maréchal Duc de Grammont became the object of the most varied and distinguished attentions.

However, inside the Palace there was but little to recall the gaiety of the streets. The melancholy Philippe IV, still as haughty and reserved as ever, despite his reverses, lived amid a luxury as heavy and sombre as his own soul. Many rooms in his Palace had not even a single window. Surrounded by costly tapestried hangings, and supported by a few grandees with rigid faces, arrogant head-dresses, insolent moustaches, and tight costumes—with not one woman present—Philippe IV gave an impression of frigidity and extreme dejection to the French Ambassador.

However, the Spanish monarch received the Maréchal de Grammont with every mark of friendliness and satisfaction. As to the matter of his daughter, he made no promise for the moment; but he gave assurance that his reply would be soon forthcoming; and, as an indication of his good intentions, he invited the Ambassador and his suite to pay their respects to the Queen and to the Infanta Marie-Thérèse. But the Maréchal de Grammont was prohibited from making to the Infanta any allusion to the object of his mission.

The reception in the Queen's apartments was of a less lugubrious nature. She was only twenty-four years old—the Infanta Marie Thérèse being twenty, while the little Infanta, who was with them, was but five—and her *entourage*, unlike the King's, comprised both men and women. As a matter of fact, on days of official reception it was the custom

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for the Queens of Spain to allow each lady of the Court to bring to the royal apartments two gentlemen from among her admirers, who were called her "*galants*"; and the curious thing was that such "*galants*" were not permitted to remove their head-dresses while they were at the Court; nor were they allowed to take notice as to who came in or went out, or as to what was going on—the supposition being that they had no eyes for anyone save the ladies they admired, and as a consequence no desire to look at the people who were round them. Naturally this custom appeared somewhat surprising to the Frenchmen, in the same way as the Infanta's immense farthingale appeared to them ugly and ridiculous.

They also noticed that Marie-Thérèse, instead of making use of her own hair, which was of a pretty blonde, wore a quantity of artificial hair on either side; and that she appeared to be as entirely ignorant of life as she was evidently convinced of the greatness of the Spanish monarchy. However, from that day onward the Duc de Grammont was given no further chance of forming any definite idea as to the personality of the future Queen of France. But, on the other hand, he and his suite profited by the respite that was given to them through the indecision of Philippe IV in studying the manners of the Spanish people. The custom which struck them as most curious was the habit the Spaniards had of all sleeping out on the commons on hot summer nights. The admixture of the two sexes in no way embarrassed them; in fact the custom was, that a single blow of the whistle brought to every bachelor Spaniard his own particular *chère-amie*. The French Ambassador was of opinion that such manners savoured rather of the practices of the old woodland deities than of the customs of human beings with centuries of civilization behind them.

The ceremonial accompanying the representation of a comedy at the Court was no less surprising to the Frenchmen. Only some ten or twelve ladies were present; and, on the conclusion of the play, these ladies all took hands to make their reverence to the King and Queen, and the combined movement took no less than a quarter-of-an-hour. The Queen and the Infanta also left the auditorium hand in hand.

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Finally, on the 20th of October, 1659, the investigations of the Frenchmen were interrupted by the reply of Philippe IV. The King of Spain announced that he would be very pleased to give the hand of his daughter, the Infanta Marie-Thérèse to the King, Louis XIV. After having paid the King a visit of thanks, and the Infanta one of congratulations, there was nothing more for the Maréchal Duc de Grammont to do but to hasten home and bear the good news to his master.

On this last visit which the Duc de Grammont paid to the Infanta Marie-Thérèse, he considered that his duty to his King required that he should say something "gallant" on his master's behalf. But, cold and reserved, and destitute of coquetry, Marie-Thérèse did not understand, or pretended not to do so. She merely replied to the Ambassador of Louis XIV: "Tell my Aunt that I shall always do as she wishes". It is to be imagined that Louis XIV would have derived more satisfaction from a reply of a somewhat more tender and personal nature. And at that moment, particularly, tenderness of a very peculiar quality indeed would have been needed to influence the King of France, for he was more enamoured of Marie Mancini than ever. To no purpose had they been separated, and to no purpose had Louis XIV, on his journey from Paris for the south in June, 1659, been everywhere received by the sympathetic enthusiasms of the people—throughout such triumphal manifestations he had thought of Marie Mancini only, and had written to her every day. He had gone to see her at Saint-Jean d'Angély, and in that interview he had shown such devotion that Marie had hoped to have extracted from him the promise that Marie-Thérèse should be a Queen to him only in name, while she, Marie, was to be the Queen that would reign in his heart. Anne of Austria, in her distress at her son's unhappiness, had silenced the dictates of her deep-seated religion, and had given her assent to the meeting. But again Mazarin had intervened, and had brought the lovers to despair. Certainly, Louis XIV was no longer, as in the days of the Fronde, a child to be instructed by the First Minister in everything he should do. Mazarin could no longer, as at that time, direct the King to smile in order to appease the crowd, or

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send him forth on his great horse, alone, through the streets of Paris. Louis XIV had now a will of his own, and was evincing symptoms of being more ready to rule than to obey.

But in Mazarin's hands lay the outcome of the Peace, and his influence over Louis XIV was still immense. And when Mazarin realized that Marie and Louis had met again in Aunis, at a time too when he was fighting his tremendous diplomatic duel with the Spanish Minister, and saw that both of them—in a way even supported by the Queen-Mother—were on the point of rendering all his efforts useless, in the exasperation of his anger and disappointment he wrote to the King, at Saint-Jean de Luz, an admonitory letter.<sup>1</sup>

The receipt of this letter plunged Louis XIV into despair—but, as had happened in Savoy, he yielded. On returning to Bordeaux, he had brought with him a little dog to which Marie had been devoted. He desired to have something which would continually remind him of her, and the dog became an object of his constant care. Every day he wrote passionate letters to her, but, disappointed in her hopes, she was now on her dignity, and did not reply; and Louis was wretched, as a consequence of her silence—wretched amid the joyous fêtes, which the Province continued to offer him during his triumphal progress towards the Pyrenees.

At length the marriage of the Infanta and Louis XIV was fixed for the spring of 1660. The King, accompanied by his mother, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, several Princes of the Blood, famous generals, and a numerous suite of exceptional brilliance, arrived at Saint-Jean de Luz in May, whilst the Infanta Marie-Thérèse and Philippe IV had left Madrid with great pomp on the 15th of April.

The journey of the King of Spain and his daughter was also a triumphal progress. Everywhere along their route they were welcomed by enthusiastic fêtes and fairy-like illuminations. Certain fêtes, however, were too thoroughly

<sup>1</sup> For the text of this letter, and for further details as to the relations between Louis XIV and Marie Mancini, see the passages bearing on the point in the preceding chapter on *Marie Mancini and Louis XIV*.

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Spanish in their character for us to be able to understand their attraction. At Alcalá de Hénarès, for instance, the Sovereign was present at a bull-race, which was run at night by the light of torches ; and, as a conclusion to the *spectacle*, the unfortunate animals were smeared with tar and set light to, to the accompaniment of fireworks—and the fête came to an end to the sound of the tortured screams of the poor martyred beasts.

However, as though to balance the scales, Philippe IV and Marie-Thérèse piously made a point of visiting all the convents and churches lying along the route.

The pretty little picturesque town of Fontarabia, situated on the Spanish frontier, was their ultimate goal ; and there, on the 3rd of June, 1660, Marie-Thérèse, Infanta of Spain and elder daughter of Philippe IV and the late Queen, Elizabeth of France, daughter of Henri IV, was married by proxy in the little parish church—sumptuously decorated and crowded with prelates of all ranks—to Louis XIV, King of France and Navarre. Immediately the benediction had been pronounced, Philippe IV caused his daughter, who had been standing on his left as Infanta of Spain, to take her place on his right, as Queen of France. The wedding-day was passed by the Court of Spain in severe solemnity. Fontarabia on that day had never been more *triste*. Philippe IV was regarding the marriage merely from the point of view of its grave responsibilities and the obligations which it would impose—thoughts little calculated to give rise to pleasure ; and in addition to this, despite his sternness of attitude, tenderly loving his daughter as he did, the thought of their coming separation was to him profoundly painful.

At Saint-Jean de Luz, on the contrary, the marriage was being celebrated by dances and gaieties of all kinds. All Paris had assembled there—and everyone, in the excitement of the novelty produced by the charming rural surroundings, determined to outshine his neighbour in brilliancy and wit. Louis XIV himself, carried away by the general rejoicing and the novelty of his own sensations, celebrated in the highest spirits his marriage with a Princess whom he had never seen, and to whom he wrote on the following day a

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very cold letter. This letter, which accompanied by a gift of thirty-five thousand francs' worth of jewellery, was worded as follows :

"To receive at one and the same time a letter from Your Majesty and the news of the celebration of our marriage, and to be on the eve of having the happiness of seeing Her, are assuredly subjects of inexpressible joy to me. My cousin, the Duc de Créqui, Gentleman of my Bedchamber, whom I send expressly to Your Majesty, will communicate to Her the feelings of my heart, wherein She will discover an extreme impatience to be in a position to speak to her myself. He will present to her also on my behalf certain trinkets.

LOUIS".

The Infanta received the trinkets—which were of course the already mentioned pearls—with the glacial indifference of her customary manner. She did not even open the casket, but gave it to a Lady of Honour, putting however the key in her own pocket.

Diaz Vélasquez had been sent from Madrid to superintend the artistic transformation of the pavilion of the *Île des Faisans* into a reception-hall ; and on the 5th of June Philippe IV conducted his daughter in great state on to the island. The barge which carried them across was so richly decorated that it gave an impression, as it crossed in the sunlight, of being made of gold.

The interview arranged for this particular day, however, did not include Louis XIV, who was away at Saint-Jean de Luz. But youth, curiosity and enthusiasm getting the upper hand, Louis, superbly dressed in cloth of gold and silver and splendidly beribboned and beplumed, sprang on to his horse, and, accompanied by the Prince de Conti and some twenty selected courtiers, rode to the point on the French bank nearest to the island ; and there, seized with impatience to see his Queen, he dismounted—and shortly afterwards suddenly appeared in the hall of reception. Marie-Thérèse thought him so beautiful that she nearly swooned with happiness ; and then, recovering, she blushed to the roots of her hair, and remained blushing for a whole

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quarter of an hour. Philippe IV, despite his natural coldness and passion for etiquette, also went so far as to say to his sister, Queen Anne : " I shall certainly have a very handsome son-in-law ! "

But he never addressed a word to Louis XIV. Neither did the Infanta—but in any case, she was too agitated to have spoken. And Louis XIV merely gazed at Marie-Thérèse—but he felt no inclination, like the Queen, to swoon with joy. He was certainly disappointed from the very first ; but, on leaving the hall, he called all his natural gallantry to his aid by saying to Monsieur de Turenne : " Certainly, the ugliness of the Infanta's clothes and coiffure surprised me—but I studied her attentively, and I don't think I shall find any difficulty in being able to love her ".

Was Marie-Thérèse's mind of a quality to acquire, what from the first her face had totally failed to obtain ? That, however, was not the question which absorbed the Queen on the evening she returned to Fontarabia. She returned there, happy and deeply moved, her young heart filled with the thought of her gallant husband. Even in the past, in her pious reveries, she had always seen him noble and good. She had wept at the thought that he was going to marry Marguerite of Savoy. But now that he had actually appeared to her as a vision of charm and beauty, she was conscious of being strangely stirred. There seemed to be born within her a new woman, anxious to be loved, curious, desiring to please, uneasy. She knew, for the first time, that she loved her husband more even than she loved her father. Her prayers that evening, which were more prolonged than usual, certainly contained more references to Louis XIV than to Philippe IV. Thus, from the first moment that she saw the King, her husband, there awoke in the heart of Marie-Thérèse a perfect love, compact of adoration and desire—a love, the more intense in that the heart of the young girl had never experienced before anything stronger than family affection, and her dual nature of pure woman and ardent Spaniard did not admit of any compromise.

On Sunday, the 6th of June, Marie-Thérèse and Philippe IV returned to the Île des Faisans to take part in the final conference. On this occasion the Contract of Peace was read ;

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and when at the conclusion of the reading Philippe IV ceremoniously and slowly pronounced the words "I swear peace", Louis XIV, with spontaneous enthusiasm called out: "I swear peace and friendship too". Such impulsive utterance of youth was in no way calculated to diminish the love which Marie-Thérèse had vowed to him. So, though on that day she addressed to Louis only a few words of an official and memorized character, her heart spake to him at length, and she could pay no interest to the persons who were being presented to her father. The latter, however, did not fail to befit the occasion when the Maréchal de Turenne was presented. After having scrutinized him for a long time, "He has made me pass many a bad night", he said.

Finally the day of separation between father and child arrived. It was the 7th of June, and on that day, Philippe IV, overcome with grief, entered the Infanta's room at early dawn, to take his last farewell. The King could not contain his feelings, and, clasping his daughter in his arms, wept without restraint. However, in the midst of their tears, Marie-Thérèse saw once more the enchanting vision of her young and splendid husband; and it was that that gave her strength, and enabled her, though she was the one who had to go, to give comfort to her father. Both of them, accompanied by the highest nobility of Spain, left the Palace of Fontarabia at half-past two in the afternoon. They entered again that same superb barge that shone like gold, and arrived at the Île des Faisans exactly at the same moment as the French Court. On this occasion, the greatest affection was displayed on both sides. Anne of Austria and Philippe IV embraced tenderly; and, when Philippe was about to go, both Louis XIV and Marie-Thérèse flung themselves into his arms. All the Spaniards desired to kiss the hand of Anne of Austria, and all the French who had accompanied their King to Saint-Jean de Luz begged for permission to touch with their lips the hand of Marie-Thérèse. To them, the daughter of Philippe was no longer a Spaniard. And she had, as a matter of fact, already become the obedient wife of Louis XIV. For, that very same evening, the King having expressed the hope that, instead of taking part in



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the fêtes, she would take some repose, Marie-Thérèse hastened to do his bidding, and was so ingenuous as to appear before the King at supper with her hair all down and in an ordinary dressing-gown.

On the 9th a further marriage-ceremony was solemnly conducted at Saint-Jean de Luz. The little town overflowed with splendour. A new doorway had to be made in the wall of the tiny church to admit the wedding procession—a doorway which was immediately walled up again after the ceremony, and has never since been reopened. The evening was devoted to the play—a French comedy, and one in the young Queen's language.

But Marie-Thérèse paid but little attention. She was so dazzled by Louis XIV that, throughout the festivities, she could think of nothing but him and her own happiness in being his Queen. In the evening, when they were alone, the great unique favour which she begged of him was that he would always keep her as near to him as possible; and Louis XIV summoned the gentlemen of his household, and gave the order that during the course of the journey the Queen should be quartered in immediate proximity to himself.

However, neither Marie-Thérèse nor Louis XIV had the training, character, or tastes to justify such an experiment in intimacy, so rarely to be met with in royal households. Marie-Thérèse undoubtedly loved her husband devotedly, but her physical appearance was against her. Without being exactly ugly, nobody could have called her pretty. She had certain good points, it is true. Her skin was white, her eyes of a delicate blue, and her hair fair and plentiful. But she was short and devoid of charm and elegance. She had no notion how to wear her clothes or how to do her hair. Her face with its heavy cheeks was too long and entirely lacking in expression. Mentally, also, as well as physically, she was not endowed with the qualities necessary to enable her to preside over a brilliant Court. She had no brightness of manner, and her inert mind could not respond to the polite wit of the period. Brought up in a *triste* Court, she had no inclination for amusement, and lacked the art of making herself agreeable and attractive. She was excessively

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devout, and, having no knowledge whatever as to the ways of the world, she innocently thought that to be good and affectionate was all that love could possibly require. In addition to this, too reserved and aloof to trust in anyone save her husband and her mother-in-law, she was never in a position to acquire from her entourage knowledge on those particular subjects such as had been studiously concealed from her at the Court of Spain.

And, side by side with this good and dull little Queen, was Louis, yearning for life and excitement. Nature had given to him the vigorous health which it had denied to Marie-Thérèse, and all his contemporaries are unanimous in describing him as having been exceptionally handsome. But no one admired or loved him so much as he admired and loved himself. His education had developed his pride and hereditary egotism to such a point that, in seeking his own pleasure and amusements, he really imagined himself to be fulfilling the duties of a good King. To all outward appearances he was kind ; his politeness was exquisite, and his amiability unceasing ; but, under cover of these seductive manners, he never interested himself in the happiness of others unless such happiness chanced to serve his own pleasure or glory. His heart had certainly known passion previous to his marriage ; but, however deeply Marie Mancini may have disturbed it, he was in no way disposed to sacrifice the three million dowry of Marie-Thérèse. When Marie-Thérèse became his wife, he might have remained faithful to her, had she known how to amuse, flatter, and captivate him. But as Marie-Thérèse was neither astute, *coquette*, nor brilliant, and had only her inexperience, love, immense devotion and youth to offer to the King, Louis XIV had tired of her before even they had reached their Capital. Setting out from Saint-Jean de Luz on the 15th of June, 1660, the Sovereigns arrived at Bordeaux on the 28th of the same month ; and in that town Louis XIV decided, despite the protestations of Mazarin, the supplications of Anne of Austria, and the timid tears of Marie-Thérèse, that the two Queens were to continue the journey alone, while he himself was going into Aunis. He was setting forth on a love-pilgrimage to Brouage, where Marie Mancini had previously passed her months of exile.

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Of what importance was it to Marie-Thérèse, suffering under the torture of a profound jealousy, to know that the King esteemed her ; or that, on the 26th August, he reserved for her all the honours of a triumphal entry into Paris, the magnificence of which was without precedent ? Seated alone in the triumphal car, covered inside and out with gold embroidery on a background of silver, and under a dais sustained by two pillars, smothered in jasmine and myrtle, symbol of love and peace, and moving on wheels encased in gold, the sad Marie-Thérèse, wearing a robe, sparkling with gold and silver and precious stones, and looking like some shrouded statue, bowing gravely to the crowd, was thinking only that but a few days had proved sufficient to rob her of a husband whose faithful slave she would have been glad to be, had he but only sometimes taken notice of her.

And strange coincidence !—while the poor girl, in her loneliness, was thus pursuing her triumphal way through Paris, two women, who had both come to Madame de Beauvais'—Anne of Austria's favourite Woman of the Bed-chamber—to see the royal procession pass, gazed down together at the same moment on the pathetic picture of Marie-Thérèse. The one was the actual beloved of the King, Marie Mancini, on the eve of being sent into Italy, and the other was Madame Scarron, who was to have the distinction of bringing wisdom to Louis in his later years, and to be his last love.

# HENRIETTA OF ENGLAND

## DUCHESS D'ORLEANS

[1644-1670]

Henrietta of England, daughter of Charles I, who died on the scaffold at Whitehall on the 30th of January, 1649, and of Henriette-Marie de France, his dethroned and exiled Queen, was one of those Princesses who seem to have been pursued by a malignant fate from birth to death, and who yet have bequeathed to posterity an impression of such radiance that the memory instinctively dwells on their fascination and éclat rather than on their actual misfortunes.

Henrietta was born at Exeter, on the 16th of June, 1644, in the midst of the Civil War. A fortnight after her birth, her mother was compelled to leave her, and to seek safety in France. In the month of August, 1646, the infant Princess fell into the hands of the Parliamentary troops; and it was only after difficult negotiations, extending over three months, that the child was finally handed back to her mother, and sent to France. There, under the severe and somewhat morose guardianship of that unfortunate Queen, Henrietta was brought up, amid the solitudes of the monastery of Chaillot and within the gloom of the Château de Colombes, among friends as serious-minded as her mother. But the child, despite her isolation and delicacy of health, showed a natural inclination for gaiety and active diversions. She danced with incomparable grace, rode splendidly, sang divinely, and showed a great talent for the harpsichord. Her pleasing manners, mental qualities, and animation created general attention at the Court festivities, given in celebration of the success of the French troops in Flanders; and this impression was greatly intensified in 1660, at the time of Louis XIV's marriage with the Infanta Marie-Thérèse. Queen Henriette had vainly attempted to arrange a marriage between her daughter and Louis XIV. Neither the appearance nor

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the dowry of the Princess had appealed to the King of France.

It is possible that her failure to effect this marriage influenced the Queen in taking her daughter to England in November, 1660; for her son Charles II, owing to General Monk having declared for the monarchy, had triumphantly entered his Capital on the previous 8th of June.

However, the Princess was not to remain for long in England. Though Louis XIV had not wanted her for his own wife, he had no objection to her being his sister-in-law; and in December, 1660, he formally asked for the hand of the Princess on behalf of Philippe de France, his younger brother. Queen Henriette-Marie and her son Charles II accepted with enthusiasm an alliance which, though falling short of what they had originally hoped for, was in every way desirable from their own point of view.

On the 2nd of January, 1661, Queen Henriette-Marie and her daughter entered their carriage in Saint-James' Park, with the purpose of proceeding to Portsmouth, to meet again the accepted *fiancé* in France. The Duke of Buckingham, who was enamoured of the Princess, requested permission to follow them, and Charles II weakly agreed. They set sail in 'The London', but had barely reached Horse Sand when the ship, owing to damages received, had to return to port for repair. But this contretemps was not to be the only one of the journey. Portsmouth, where the Princesses had now to remain, was a prey to several epidemics. Both small-pox and measles were raging there; and within four or five days of their return to Portsmouth Henrietta became seriously ill, and the question as to which of the two complaints she was sickening for became a matter of grave apprehension. At first it was believed to be small-pox; and the Duke of Buckingham behaved outrageously, begging to be allowed to enter the sick-room, to help those who were in charge of the invalid. But his request was refused—the Earl of Sandwich alone being accorded the dangerous privilege—and in his fierce jealousy against the Earl he challenged him to a duel, with the firm intention of stretching him out on the ground. But, with wise prudence, the Earl definitely declined to fight till the moment when the Princess' convalescence—for



HENRIETTA DUCHESS OF ORLEANS  
Daughter of Charles I of England , known as Madame



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her complaint had been only measles—made it no longer necessary.

As soon as she had recovered, Henrietta of England re-embarked, and arrived in France with her mother and a portion of her suite in March, 1661. The Princess was received in her new country as though she had been a Sovereign. An uninterrupted succession of festivities accompanied her from Amiens to Paris ; and on the 1st of April, 1661, in the Great Hall of the Palais Royal was celebrated the official ceremony of Betrothal of the daughter of Charles I of England and of Henriette-Marie de France, daughter of Henri Quatre, with " Monsieur ", Louis XIV's brother. On the occasion of his marriage, the Prince was created Duc d'Orléans ; and on the following day the marriage took place in the private chapel of Queen Henriette-Marie. But the ceremony was of the simplest kind, in consequence of its being Lent. The Queen Dowager of England, however, permitted herself to give a private supper to all the members of the Royal Family to meet the bride and bridegroom.

Never did a marriage appear more expedient, both from the personal and the political points of view, than that of Henrietta of England and Philippe de France ; yet never did a marriage more painfully humiliate all that was tender and delicate and devoted in the heart of a young wife. The couple had nothing in common, beyond the tie, that united them. Their tastes, aspirations, training, character, all were diametrically opposed. " Madame ", lively, intelligent, graceful, and cultivated, loved success, intellect and adventure. She was devoted to sports of a most active kind, and to reading—especially books dealing with moral and theological subjects. Horse-riding was her favourite form of exercise. She had a warm heart that yearned for love and devotion ; a natural frankness of disposition that made dissimulation insupportable to her ; a loyalty of feeling so deep and complete that even the consuming activity of her own temperament could not shake it ; and a desire to please and to be generally amiable, which made her extremely attractive. " If someone happened to be looking at her, and she became aware of the fact ", said the Abbé de Choisy, a contemporary of hers, " it was impossible for that person not to believe that he was the



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one person she was solely desirous of pleasing". The Comte de Guiche, who had such especial opportunities of knowing her intimately, says elsewhere: "If she make the most trifling remark, she seems to be asking for one's heart". Madame, then, was one of the elect— a creature of sensibility, enthusiasm, intelligence, delicacy, and heart.

The Duke, her husband—either from faulty education or from inherent temperament—interested himself only in puerile and effeminate amusements. His principal occupations were the study of Court etiquette, dancing, music, and the consideration of his clothes. One day he actually burst into tears because his favourite, the Chevalier de Lorraine, refused to give him the exact receipt for a pomade which was supposed to produce a fresh complexion and soft skin. The preservation of his complexion, in all its brilliance, was one of Monsieur's great cares—and he instinctively disliked riding, hunting, or any form of violent exercise. He, however, curiously enough, did not lack courage when the occasion demanded it; for in the war in Flanders he gave such proof of it as to excite his brother's jealousy. But Monsieur, perhaps, would take risks for France which he would never have thought of taking for what was called pleasure. He would pass most of his day lying on a couch, or gazing into a mirror, or busy in his *cabinet de toilette*. At the moment he married Henrietta of England, he did really believe himself to be in love with her. But, as Madame de la Fayette wrote: "The miracle of inflaming the heart of Philippe d'Orléans was not in the power of any woman". Within a fortnight of his marriage, Philippe d'Orléans had no feeling for his wife save jealousy—one of those carping, mean, contemptible jealousies such as make of those they pursue perpetual victims, who can neither defend themselves nor escape the unjust persecution.

Physically, the Duc d'Orléans had the advantage of his wife. He was short, but remarkably well proportioned. His legs, feet, and hands were perfectly shaped. His face was narrow and well-formed, with very striking eyes and sweet expression, an aquiline nose and a pleasing smile, and he had an abundance of naturally curling dark hair and beautiful white teeth. He was, therefore, certainly good-looking—but his

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good looks were of so effeminate a character, as to have been more suitable to a woman than to a man.

The young Duchess had beautiful blue eyes, a delicate pink and white complexion, rosy lips, pretty chestnut hair, and a smile replete with intelligence, grace, and charm; but her face was a little too long for positive beauty, and her figure was not quite perfect, for one of her shoulders was slightly higher than the other. However, so much amiability, elegance, vitality, and fascination emanated from her personality that such slight defects passed unperceived.

The hopes of happiness and illusions of this young girl of seventeen had dispersed within a fortnight. In fact, two weeks had not elapsed before Monsieur had ceased to find any attraction in Madame's society. Her superiority gave him a sense of humiliation. She, however, with a profound instinct of feminine delicacy, did her utmost to suppress, beneath a deference and an unchanging sweetness of manner, that particular quality in her which offended him. But before long, in spite of her efforts, Philippe made no further attempt to conceal his real feelings towards his wife, or in what direction he was really attracted. While remaining, either through vanity or tyranny, very jealous of the Duchess, he exhibited for the Chevalier de Lorraine a weakness such as Henrietta herself could not fail to notice. In addition to this, the favourite, taking advantage of his ascendancy over the Duke, indulged in all sorts of insolences towards the Duchess. And it was from then that the Chevalier started against her that campaign of persecution—by means of slander, cabals, and machinations of every kind—which was not to cease even after he himself had been finally arrested (December, 1669).

But Madame was very young—and she loved gaiety—and possessed an exceptional vitality combined with a profound power of fascination; and so—unable, as she was, to help despising her husband—is it to be wondered that she sought refuge from the prospective unhappiness of her position in amusement? The young Court of Louis XIV was all the more inclined to gaiety and brilliance from the fact that, for years past, it had been deprived, through the meanness of Mazarin, of all entertainments that were not absolutely indispensable; and the time had now come when the young King, freed from

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all restraint, was going to compensate himself to his heart's content for all the severity he had endured in his earlier days. Madame, then, for the next few months, both at the Tuileries and Fontainebleau became, as it were, the Queen of the revels at a Court, given up wholly to laughter and amusement. "At that period", a contemporary scribe recorded, "all France was at her feet: the men, thinking only of how to pay her suitable court, and the women how to obtain her friendship".

Louis XIV himself, oblivious of the fact that but a short time before he had pronounced her plain, now came wholly under the influence of her fascinations; and they gradually drew one another into a veritable vortex of gaiety. One day there might be a pleasure-party on the lake, enlivened by the blare of trumpets—though these were shortly to be replaced by twenty-six violins, playing the strains of Lulli and Lambert. At other times there would be rides through the forest, picnics in the woods, and impromptu dances on the grass. There were concerts on the water, hunting parties, torchlight promenades, and *bals champêtres*, while within the Palace they rehearsed the ballets of Benserade. Every morning the Duchesse d'Orléans, accompanied by all her ladies-of-honour, rode off on horseback, to bathe; and, on their return the daring cavalcade, dressed in their best, were met by the King, lords, and gentlemen, similarly apparelled and in equally high spirits. Louis XIV and the Duchess would then take the lead of the double procession, and, day by day, the fun and laughter of the morning ride increased. The Princess was the life and soul of all these gaieties, and the King displayed towards her the utmost gallantry. Between them, they devised and organized a torch-light ballet on horseback. The Court, seething with youth and joy and excitement, openly spoke of there being two Queens at Fontainebleau—the one, Marie-Thérèse, ailing and wrapped in religion, and the other, Henriette d'Orléans, captivating and irresistible. In the midst of these triumphs Madame became oblivious of her domestic troubles. She hardly noticed her husband's ill-humour, or that childish and exasperating laugh of his that had so humiliated her from the first days of their union—his delight in his own reflection in the looking-glass—the pin-pricks of the

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Chevalier de Lorraine, who did not spare her—in fact the whole gamut of little afflictions that made up the sum total of her domestic life. She found her pleasure in the King, in his manifest sympathy for her, in the beauty and skill he displayed whether in the ball-room or in the field, in his dignity and in his real nobility. Her enthusiastic heart went out towards the young hero, whom poets were hailing, painters immortalizing, philosophers praising, and Ministers and Court declaring to be so great a King. She desired to be his good fairy, to whisper into his ear all the good he could do, and to be an ornament to his Court; and he was to be her ideal friend—the one that possessed her inmost thoughts, with whom she would always be in perfect sympathy, and with whom she could discuss and carry through any enterprise pertaining to the great and the beautiful. In a word, Henrietta of England dreamed of a friendship with the King of infinite sympathy, possessing all the enthusiasms of love, but devoid of all its weaknesses.

Madame was enabled to enjoy this royal and ideal friendship from May, 1661, to July of the same year. During those three months the King and the Duchesse d'Orléans shared their pleasures, emotions, and triumphs. In their impulsive enthusiasm, they conceived the idea of offering to the Court a *spectacle* superior to anything it had ever seen. And such was the origin of the famous "Ballet of the Seasons", on which neither labour nor expense was spared. An immense theatre was built, and the stage was so constructed that it was capable of being moved backwards and forwards, by machinery, with the actors in position. The "Ballet of the Seasons" was given towards the end of July, 1661, in the Park of Fontainebleau. Madame impersonated the Goddess Diana surrounded by her nymphs, and Louis XIV took the part of Spring—and the evening proved a striking triumph for the Duchess, and a veritable apotheosis for the King.

But the success of this superb fête had not been attained without trouble and much heart-burning. For several weeks past Monsieur had felt grave displeasure at the great friendship existing between the King and his wife. The Queen Dowager, Anne of Austria, had entirely sympathized with Monsieur's point of view, and had agreed that the King was treading on dangerous ground. The young Queen, too, had

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added her complaints to those of the Duke, her brother-in-law—for that secret but intense jealousy which was to darken her whole life had already begun to torment her. And the Court was whispering freely that the attraction between Madame and the King was assuredly the precursor of something deeper. So the Queen-Mother, in her anxiety for the safety of the King's soul, together with a solicitude for the home-circles of both her sons, spoke both to Madame and to the King—and with a warmth of feeling and expression that was usual to her, when she was deeply moved. Madame, whose temperament was such as to impel her eagerly to pursue her own inclinations, provided they were intrinsically harmless, and who realized that her happiness was dependent on a continuance of her friendship with the King, decided to ignore everything—her mother-in-law's reproofs, her husband's insinuations, and the Chevalier de Lorraine's mischievous designs. But there was so much talk and scandal on the subject of this intimacy between the King and his sister-in-law that the Princess was compelled to resort to precautions and pretence.

In order to soothe all susceptibilities, she decided to have a third person present whensoever she was with the King. She chose for this invidious duty a girl of the *petite noblesse*, and without ambition, the youngest and most retiring of her maids-of-honour—Louise de la Vallière; and from that moment the young girl always was in attendance on her mistress when she accompanied the King. But Louise, whom Henrietta had considered to be nothing to look at, had, as a matter of fact, a distinct allurements of her own—due as much to her sweetness, candour, and simplicity as to her flower-like complexion and appealing blue eyes. Her ingenuous charm attracted the King more readily, possibly because she was the first wholly unsophisticated girl he had ever come across. His interest in her rapidly increased, and before long he had asked her to take a part in the Ballet of the Seasons. Further than that, he actually himself instructed her in the part that had been assigned to her, and on the evening of the performance was one of the first to notice her success.

Madame was as prompt to perceive the attraction of Louis XIV for Louise de la Vallière as the King had been to

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fall under the spell of the young girl's charm—and the realization of their mutual sympathy caused her acute distress. She attempted to check its development, but without result, and the day on which Louis XIV made the discovery that Louise de la Vallière loved him, the Duchesse d'Orléans recognized that she was likely to lose the King. Whereas she had built her hopes of happiness on the King's friendship, the Duchess did not accept her poignant disappointment without a struggle. "We enter into Paradise, only to be immediately expelled", she said bitterly in the first days of the *liaison* between Louis and Louise—and she worked desperately to evade such expulsion. She endeavoured to attain her end by emphasizing to the King La Vallière's weak points: her *petite noblesse*, suggestion of lameness, timidity, lack of *savoir-faire*, and questionable claim to good looks. But Louis XIV's love for Louise only increased each time she was thus attacked. Henrietta, acting foolishly, like all women who love and know that they are losing ground, made a still greater tactical error. After having first irritated the King, and thereby enhanced his passion, Madame was unable to conceal her personal disdain for La Vallière, and she manifested it in a manner that could not be mistaken. Louise made no mention of it to the King. But his love instantly divined it, and to such purpose that the attitude of the Duchesse d'Orléans towards her gentle rival served only to accelerate the final despair of Madame and the ultimate triumph of Louise de la Vallière. On the day of the splendid entertainment that Fouquet gave to his King, at Vaux, Henriette d'Orléans knew definitely that Louis' affection for her was dead, and that thenceforth La Vallière was to reign in his heart—as a very sweet and gentle Queen, but none the less all-powerful. Wounded and disappointed for the second time, Madame was unable to conceal her grief. She allowed her tears to fall even in public; and the Court discussed her self-evident sadness in the same way as previously they had discussed her friendship for the King. They chattered about her paleness, lack of spirits, tired-looking smile, and drawn expression. One of the lords of the Court who pitied her wrote: "Madame's life was solely made up of hope, pride, and regret in respect to the King's affection".

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In the summer of 1662 Madame was recovering from the effects of her bitter disappointment. She had been greatly upset by the insulting attitude of her husband ; and, gradually succumbing to the unhealthy atmosphere and accommodating morals of the Court, she permitted the attentions of one of the best-known and striking personalities in the entourage of the King—the Comte de Guiche. He was a young man of exceptional appearance and high courage, extremely proud of his rank and position, and a recognized expert in the realm of “galanterie”. Undoubtedly, he was proud and vain, but in his endeavours to make a pleasing impression on Madame he contrived to conceal his defects. He was able to affect a humble attitude, and even deigned to plead, when his wishes were not acceded to. And, one day, this young man, who had hitherto been accustomed to lord it over women was heard to exclaim in rapturous content : “ I have seen her again—and I am mad with joy ! ”

What was the actual nature of this greatly discussed friendship between Madame and the Comte de Guiche ? Saint-Simon, when writing of it, comes to the following conclusion as to Madame’s conduct : “ She is the only French Princess who has ever had an intrigue ”. Saint-Simon is confirmed in his opinion that there was a real intrigue between the two by the fact that the Duchesse d’Orléans appointed the Duchesse de Valentinois—the Comte de Guiche’s sister—Mistress of the Household. Friendship, however, would be quite sufficient to account for such choice. There can be no doubt that Madame was most imprudent, *coquette* even, in the sense that she allowed the Count to express feelings for her which she ought to have repudiated ; but guilty Madame never was, neither with de Guiche, nor de Vardes—de Guiche’s false friend—nor de Lauzun. Saint-Simon condemned her, possibly, because he was in opposition to the d’Orléans family, or possibly because he listened to the gossip of the Duchess’ enemies. The two scathing pamphlets published in Holland against the Princess were still more destitute of foundation. The guarantee for Madame’s conduct is to be found in her strict bringing-up, her general disposition, and particularly in the formal declaration which she voluntarily made to her husband on her death-bed. No—the Comte de

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Guiche was never the lover of Henrietta of England. To a certain extent he took the place in her heart that the King had vacated. This stormy friendship which ended by the Count being banished brought but little happiness to either of the parties concerned. The Chevalier de Lorraine distorted its incidents so as to make Monsieur convinced of his wife's guilt, and de Vardes similarly lied in all directions so as to derive all possible advantage from the absence of the man whose friend he professed to be. The only two who were frank and straightforward in the whole affair were the Duchesse d'Orléans and the Comte de Guiche.

In the meantime neither joys, nor sorrows—nor even the delicacy of health, which supervened after the birth of a daughter, on the 27th of March, 1662, and several subsequent miscarriages—prevented the Duchesse d'Orléans from lending her patronage to arts and letters, and from following attentively the march of political events, both in respect to France and England. Having an enthusiastic admiration for Molière's work, in 1664 she expressed herself most anxious to stand god-mother to his new-born child. She was devoted to the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, and proposed to the two poets a subject for a new play which had a particular attraction for her, in that it recalled to her the story of her own romantic friendship with the King. In suggesting this competition, Henrietta could not have realized how very unfair it was to the aged Corneille. However, the outcome of the suggestion was the delicious idyll of *Bérénice* by Racine, and the wearisome tragedy of *Tite et Bérénice* by Corneille. On the evening of the first representation of Racine's *Bérénice* it is said that everyone in the hall turned to look first at Louis XIV and then at Madame, when the actress playing the part of Bérénice had reached the scene of her dismissal by Titus, and pronounced the words :

“ You are the King—you love me—and I go ”.

Boileau, also, was much esteemed by the Duchesse d'Orléans ; and one night, a few days after the appearance of his famous poem *Le Lutrin*—he, himself, being present at the Court—she went out of her way to pay him the flattering compliment of showing him that she was quite au



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*courant* of the great literary event, by whispering in his ear one of the most beautiful lines, that the poem contained :

*" Soupire, étend les bras, ferme l'œil et s'endort " .*<sup>1</sup>

Madame de la Fayette, who was a personal friend of the Princess' mother, had also a warm place in Madame's heart ; and the Duchess suggested to the former that she should write her life.

But politics occupied the attention of the Princess equally with literature. No longer bearing a grudge against Louis XIV for the disappointment he had caused her, Henrietta strove to establish between them a reciprocal and friendly attachment. And it was to this purpose that she used her influence in England to help the King's policy. She herself was convinced that Louis XIV could desire only what was right and just for both countries—and her aim was to bring her brother, Charles II, to the same opinion. And so she worked for the rapprochement of France and England, thus personally doing more in the political interests of France than any Princess of the Blood had before attempted. Neither of the two Kings had any secrets from her. She carried on a voluminous correspondence with her brother, which even the birth of her second daughter had little power to interrupt.

At length Louis XIV decided that the moment had arrived to despatch Madame to England, for the purpose of contracting a definite alliance with that country. But Monsieur formally refused his assent ; and the jealousy he evinced towards his wife's superiority, and the spiteful counsels of the Chevalier de Lorraine, strengthened him in such refusal. In order to conquer this opposition, it became necessary to exile the Chevalier de Lorraine, and to remain quite unmoved by the sulks and tears with which Monsieur finally yielded the point.

So Henrietta started, accompanied by a suite of two-hundred-and-thirty-seven, among whom was the superb young Louise de Kérouailles. She triumphantly crossed the Straits of Dover, and her journey on English territory became one long ovation. Her brother's joy at seeing her again was intense. The English historian, Lingard, claims that Madame

<sup>1</sup> Which may be literally rendered, in the same metre :

" Sighing, she moves her arms—closing her eyelids in slumber' ".—*Trans.*

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at one time considered the advisability of remaining definitely with her brother, so as to escape from her husband and his Favourite. But, despite the real happiness that Madame experienced at finding herself again in England, such a suggestion cannot be accepted. The Duchess' sense of duty, and the unvaried patience with which she always submitted to the humiliations and vexations imposed on her by her husband, did not permit of her conceiving such an idea as that of discarding a position which Fate had assigned to her. But, happy in being able to forget for a moment the tyranny of her home-life, she drank in the joy of those smiling hours, and left behind her a memory of kindness and charm.

In France, Monsieur's jealousy was increasing, in direct ratio to Madame's success in England. The new prestige of the Duchess aroused in him a paroxysm of rage and envy ; and, when he learned that her return had been delayed, he refused to go to the coast to meet her—and he kept his word : Madame, when she landed in France, was greeted neither by relative nor friend. Louis XIV had come to the conclusion that his own presence would only have emphasized the absence of his brother. Queen Henriette-Marie had died on the 10th of September, 1669. The Duchess' own children were much too young to have taken such a journey ; and the courtiers were not in a position to do otherwise than follow the example of the King. And so it happened that on this particular day of the 24th of June, 1670, the Princess, who had just secured for France the greatest of alliances, was met as she stepped on shore only by the sound of trumpets and the harsh clang of bells instead of the sight of fond, familiar faces.

Henrietta was profoundly saddened by her treatment. Her journey to Paris was grey and *triste*, and her arrival home a painful experience. On the 26th of June she went to Versailles to report to the King, and to acquaint him with the details of her mission ; and the two were talking in a most animated manner when the door suddenly opened, and Philippe d'Orléans entered and burst forth into a string of passionate reproaches. When, a little later, she moved on to see the Queen, everybody was struck by the change in her appearance. Mademoiselle de Montpensier, who was

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with the Queen at the moment, wrote in her Memoirs : " She looked like a corpse, with rouge on its face ", and again : " Madame had death depicted on her face ". However, on the 27th the Duchesse d'Orléans bathed in the Seine, contrary to the advice of her doctor, Yvelin—and in the evening remained chatting with her dear friend Madame de la Fayette in the garden out at St. Cloud till midnight. She returned home early on the morning of the 28th, attended Mass, and afterwards was present at a sitting at which her elder daughter's portrait was being painted. The Princess dined as usual ; but after dinner she seemed extremely depressed. She asked Madame de la Fayette if she were afraid of death. " I don't think I should be afraid ", she said. After having discussed for some time this gloomy topic, she said she felt tired, and she lay on some cushions on the floor, with her head resting on Madame de la Fayette's knees. She slept in this way for over an hour ; but during her sleep she looked so ill that even Monsieur remarked on it as he crossed the room. When she awoke, she said she was thirsty, and Madame de Gourdon, a Woman of the Bedchamber, brought her some iced chicory in a cup, which had been given her by the Marquis d'Effiat, a friend of the Chevalier de Lorraine.

She had hardly finished drinking the chicory when she was seized with violent pains, and declared that she had been poisoned. She was carried to her bed, where she begged for antidotes ; but though she took several, she obtained but little relief. When the English Ambassador, Sir Ralph Montagu, was informed of her illness, he at once went to see her ; and, as he approached the bed, the Duchess hurriedly said : " The King has nothing to do with this—you must not lay the blame on him ". In the meanwhile, Monsieur was testifying to his grief by declining to leave her. But his presence only irritated the Duchess—and she was anxious to make her last farewell to him, so as to get rid of him. " Alas ! Monsieur ", she said, " it is a long time since you have loved me—you have been most unjust to me—for I have never been untrue to you ". Such solemn affirmation is the best refutation of the calumnies whereby she had been victimized. At the time she was a true believer, and convinced that she was dying—and under such circumstances

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one does not lie. After having thus assured him of her fidelity, she made to him her last requests, and bade him farewell—and then begged him to leave her as she desired to die in peace.

In the course of the evening the King and Queen came to see her. She was, by that time, very ill. They had had recourse to bleeding, in the hope of relieving the paroxysms of suffocation ; but, though the first attempt produced some result, the second failed. Then Monsieur again rushed in, in a flood of tears—and he was again persuaded to retire. Madame desired to be alone with God. The canon, who first arrived at her bedside, addressed her harshly, exclaiming : “ You have caused much scandal at the Court ” ; to which she replied, gently : “ Pardon, but in my expiation, I would prefer to suffer in silence ”. Luckily, Bossuet, who knew the Princess intimately, and had himself instructed her in the Catholic faith, arrived in time ; and he was able to give her comfort, reminding her of the reasons that existed for putting one's trust in the divine goodness, and brightening her last hours with earthly affection and the hope eternal. Madame, kindly and considerate almost to the last, entrusted to one of her ladies a superb emerald, to be given to Bossuet as a last token of her gratitude. At half-past two in the morning Madame died, courageously, and in the grace of God.

As Madame de Sévigné wrote : “ With her, grace and charm and joy passed from the Court ”. And, like Bossuet, all France received with a sense of shock the two messages—the one following so swiftly upon the other : “ Madame is dying ” and “ Madame is dead ”. She had been struck down in her hour of triumph, two days after her twenty-sixth birthday ; and it had taken but eight hours to send her to her last account.

So strange and sudden a death could not fail to arouse suspicions, which, as a matter of fact, permeated all ranks, including both the French and English Courts—and the Chevalier de Lorraine and the Marquis d'Effiat were privately pointed to as being the probable perpetrators of the crime. Charles II demanded an inquest and a joint autopsy, at which the English Ambassador should be present—and the

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request was granted. Hugh Chamberlain, the English doctor, and Alexander Boscher represented England at this autopsy, but the examination revealed nothing in support of the suspicions. Evidence was forthcoming to the effect that Madame des Bordes, Woman of the Bedchamber, had actually drunk out of the cup after the Princess had put it down, and that Madame de Mecklembourg had finished the bottle from which the chicory had been poured. Nevertheless, many people adhered to the poison-theory, and among them were Saint-Simon, d'Argenson, the Princesse Palatine, Voltaire, and many others. In persisting in their opinion, they probably overlooked the fact that Madame had always been delicate, and that the numerous mishaps she had had in the course of her married life may well have radically undermined her whole constitution. She was, moreover, at the moment of her death, in a delicate condition, such as would have made any iced drink a source of danger.

But such consideration paled before the revolting attitude of Philippe d'Orléans. His wife had scarcely drawn her last breath before he seized all her private papers and forced the Abbé de Montagu and Madame de Fiennes to assist him in the perusal of the secret correspondence that had passed between Henrietta of England and her brother. He refused to hand over the legacies which his wife had bequeathed to her servants, and even to pay off the debt which she owed to the Comte de Saint-Albans. Anyone who could stoop to such baseness of conduct necessarily lays himself open to suspicions of every kind.

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[1630-1676]

That period of the reign of Louis XIV, which extends from the Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659) to the first reverses in the War of the Spanish Succession, captivates the imagination by its glory, prosperity, and the atmosphere of happiness which seems to pervade it. The young King, with his good looks and faithful fulfilment of all the obligations of royalty, was worshipped by his subjects, and regarded in the light of a demi-god. The Court, more brilliant than it had ever been, formed a gathering-place for all that was noble and brave and refined among men, and well-born and beautiful among women. It became a centre of enchanting diversions. Both literature and art flourished under a King whose name had become synonymous with victory, and who yet was able to give an equal attention to the sphere of mind as to the genius of war and government. But, beneath the brilliant surface of that period as with so many others, much that was gravely objectionable lay concealed. Louis XIV, overjoyed at his liberation from the galling restrictions of his youth, enthusiastically trod the path of dalliance—and his love-affairs became the chief preoccupation of the Court. It went without question that the King should have his mistresses—and, whereas everything he did gained instant approval, it followed as a matter of course that the nobility should imitate his example. Those whose desires took them in other directions than the pursuit of love no more felt the necessity for the least restraint than did the ardent lovers themselves. In this way, it was not long before high society, with a few austere exceptions among both bourgeoisie and nobility, took it for granted, as often as not, that conduct could be determined solely in accordance with desire. Such moral laxity in time degenerated into inclinations of a dangerous and subtle kind, that were always on the increase.

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To arrive at a desired result, without a care as to the means or even crimes necessary for its attainment, became a recognized *modus operandi*—and the women seemed to vie with the men in their adherence to such principles. And among these most assuredly there never was one more venturous, crafty, and irrefutably guilty than Madeleine d'Aubray, Marquise de Brinvilliers.

Madeleine was born at Paris on the 22nd of July, 1630. She was the eldest of the five children belonging to Antoine Dreux d'Aubray d'Offémont, the Lieutenant Civil de Paris. Details are lacking as to her education; but we know that she was of good intelligence and lively disposition, that she could spell accurately—which was an extraordinary accomplishment at a time when the spelling of Madame de Sévigné, herself, for example, was of a most fantastic kind, and that her handwriting was firm and legible.

Madeleine d'Aubray d'Offémont, at the age of twenty-one, had married a young Colonel of the Normandy regiment, Antoine Gobelin, Marquis de Brinvilliers, son of the President of the Chambre des Comptes. Was it a love-marriage or merely one of arrangement? It is not known—but we know that there was but little to choose between the position, both social and financial, of the two families. The young woman's father, who was in charge of the civil administration of Paris, had to deal with matters which were in close touch with the work of the President of the Chambre des Comptes. The relatives of the young couple, also, were in touch with one another, many of them on either side being connected with the magistracy—and husband and wife contributed almost equal amounts to make up the comfortable sum of forty thousand livres with which they embarked upon married life. But the easy circumstances of the two families had not been derived from similar sources; for, whereas the Aubray d'Offémonts had always been connected with the land and the law, the fortune of the Gobelins, who had blossomed into de Brinvilliers, had had its origin in the flourishing dye-works on the banks of the Bièvre, which were to be converted later on by Colbert into factories for the production of the well-known Gobelin tapestries.

The characters of the Marquis and Marquise de Brinvilliers

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were as different as their families and means were similar. He was one of those weak individuals who passively follow the trend of their own particular failings, without evincing the least desire to resist them or considering for one moment whither it may possibly be leading them. The failings of the Marquis de Brinvilliers were gambling, to which he would without hesitation have sacrificed everything, and, incidentally, drink. Those of the Marquise were not nearly so simple. Beneath an outward appearance of delicate refinement, she possessed an indomitable spirit, which nothing could discourage or conquer. The whole of her little personality, however, suggested sweetness and timidity. She had tender blue eyes, masses of attractive brown hair, a lily-white skin, pretty little hands and feet, and a slender figure, while her little round and smiling face suggested that of a sprightly and attractive child. To these physical qualities of Madame de Brinvilliers were added a clear and precise comprehension of men and matters, a remarkable gift of expressing herself with perfect correctness and in terms of faultless propriety, an exceptional quickness of decision, and an unequalled power in presenting facts as she wished them to be seen, and, generally, in making herself believed. But, above all, she possessed a quality of courage such as might have been considered impossible to so small a person; and a strength of will and feeling such as would have made it safe for anyone, knowing her as she really was, to predict that from the day of her marriage nothing would be permitted to interfere with the accomplishment of anything she had definitely decided on doing. She was characterized by perfect self-possession, and was in no way restrained by the tenets of her religion, though to its outward observances she paid a very strict attention. When is added to all this the fact that she was frivolous, envious, and mad for luxury and amusement, it is not difficult to perceive that the Marquise de Brinvilliers needed, as a husband, some strong and determined man to direct the course of her life. But the man she had married was anything but that. He was a confirmed gambler, and, as a matter of fact, took not the slightest interest either in his wife or her conduct—insomuch that, when he rejoined his regiment in Normandy



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a few months after his marriage, he did not return to see her, except at very long intervals. The fact was his only passion was for the turn of the card ; and it was not very long before he had compromised both his own financial position and that of the Marquise.

It was over the card-table that the Marquis became intimate with a Captain in his regiment, who called himself Sainte-Croix, but who was really a Gascon bastard, named Gaudin. He was an able and fascinating man. Capable of appearing interested in everything, he understood the art of making himself amiable to all, and of successfully concealing his own lack of scruple. Possessed of good looks and the manners of good society, he could hold his own among all ranks.

When the Marquis de Brinvilliers returned to Paris, he hastened to look up Sainte-Croix, who had some time before also left Normandy. The two old friends took up again the broken threads of their former life, and presently the Marquis, who was fonder of Sainte-Croix than ever, brought him to live in his own house in the Rue Neuve Saint-Paul, where the Marquise had lived, lonely and neglected, since the first few months of her marriage. The arrival of Sainte-Croix was a very welcome diversion to the young woman, who for the past eight years had been so much thrown on her own resources ; and she, too, speedily succumbed before the fascination and amiability of the gallant Captain. In a short time she had confessed to him her dearest wish was to separate her property from that of her husband, as she feared that his gambling habits would prove the ruin of both of them. Sainte-Croix, delighted at being able to be of service to the Marquise, assisted her in every way to secure what remained of her *dot*. As was later on to be stated in open court, immediately the service was completed, Madame de Brinvilliers left Sainte-Croix no " time to sigh for the recompense he desired "—but yielded at once (1659), delighted to have at length finished with the drab life of disappointment she had lived since 1651. Monsieur de Brinvilliers, well content with anything that increased his own liberty, took good care to see nothing ; and the Marquise openly and proudly flaunted her liaison with Sainte-Croix. However, the Marquise's family were extremely

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indignant, and her father remonstrated with her severely. Madame de Brinvilliers' only reply to such manifestations of concern was to make a still more open parade of her shame. She was seen at all hours in Sainte-Croix's company ; and the scandal increased day by day, both on account of the high position of the families concerned and the provocative daring of the Marquise. Finally, to bring his daughter to her right senses, the Lieutenant Civil de Police decided to imprison the man who was the prime cause of the scandal. Sainte-Croix was arrested on the 19th of March, 1663, while in the Marquise's carriage sitting beside her ; and he was at once, under the order of Monsieur d'Aubray d'Offémont, sent to the Bastille, where he remained till the following 2nd of May.

But this act of severity, far from bringing the Marquise to repentance, exasperated and excited all the essential wickedness of her nature. Not only did she refuse to renounce Sainte-Croix ; but she resolved to have other lovers as well, to detest her father, who had so publicly humiliated her, and to have her revenge at any cost. And it was in conformity with such decisions that she yielded to the persuasions of her cousin, the Marquis de Nadaillac, by whom she had a son, who was however acknowledged by the Marquis de Brinvilliers, in the same way as he was to accept the two children she had by Sainte-Croix. The Marquise even favoured Briancourt, the tutor of her children, with her intimacy. However, such deviations from the path of virtue were to count but little in the sum-total of her offences—for it was not long before she passed from vice to crime.

In prison, Sainte-Croix did not waste his time. He at once struck up a friendship with a well-known adventurer, the Italian Exili, a species of professional poisoner, who, so rumour said, had formerly been utilized by the Prelates of the Court of Innocent X, but who was now in the service of the ex-Queen Christina of Sweden. The latter had appointed him one of her Gentlemen-in-Waiting ; and he was now in the Bastille, under suspicion of having come to France for the purpose of effecting certain mysterious poisonings in her cause. The two confederates mutually confided to one another the secrets of their own particular science. Sainte-Croix imparted to Exili the various methods of cheating at cards, while the Italian

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indicated to the Gascon the best means of getting rid of people, without arousing suspicion, who happened to stand in one's way. No one, conceivably, could have been better fitted than Sainte-Croix to profit by Exili's lessons. So, when the late Cavalry-Captain left the Bastille, he was a much more redoubtable person than when he entered it. Not only had he an unforgivable injury to avenge ; but he was in a position to avenge it, surely and without detection.

As the passion of Sainte-Croix for the Marquise de Brinvilliers had in no way abated, he confided to her all the particulars of his new science ; and, in order to perfect their knowledge of chemistry, they went to the great expert of the day, the apothecary Glaser. The Marquise being more refined in her procedure than Sainte-Croix—as befitted a woman—is stated to have gone so far as to experimentalize in her new art on the hospital patients, whom she made pretence to console by her visits and the nice things she brought them to eat. She was more incensed than Sainte-Croix himself against the Lieutenant Civil de Police ; and she wanted to assure herself that, when she finally came to deal with her father, the result would be fatal. Another subject for the Marquise's investigation into the effects of poison was one of her own servants. She gave the unfortunate woman, one Françoise Roussel, on one occasion some gooseberry jam, and on another a slice of ham, both doctored with the powder which she was intending to give her father. The effect was exactly what the two criminals had hoped for. The servant did not die, because the dose had been carefully measured so as to avoid the extreme effect ; but she became very ill, and did not completely recover till after three years. Madame de Brinvilliers and Sainte-Croix came to the conclusion that they were now fully equipped for the execution of their vengeance.

Towards the end of January, 1666, Monsieur d'Aubray d'Offémont began to experience certain symptoms of a peculiar kind ; but he attributed them to hard work and advancing years. So he continued at his usual occupations, without troubling himself much over what he regarded as a passing indisposition. But his condition grew worse instead of better, till, in June, he felt himself compelled to give in. He decided to take advantage of the Feast of Pentecost (13th

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of June, 1666), to go down to his place at Offémont, not far from Compiègne, and to invite down to stay with him those who were nearest and dearest to him. To this purpose he asked his daughter, the Marquise de Brinvilliers, to join him with her children. Madame de Brinvilliers hastened to accept—and the condition of the sick man rapidly grew worse. He suffered so much that he determined to return to Paris. But it was of no avail, for he died there on the 10th of September, bequeathing his appointment to his elder son, and almost the whole of his fortune to be divided among his two sons. Madame de Brinvilliers thus inherited scarcely anything on her father's death—except a keen sense of liberty, of which she at once took full advantage. It was, in fact, the period of her greatest moral irregularity, in which she deceived both her husband and her lover, and engaged in terrible scenes with both of them. It was also the time when her relations with Sainte-Croix became strained, and when mutual interest began to take the place of love. Both of them already inspired one another with a certain fear—though such feelings were carefully concealed under the guise of a friendly attitude. But, as a matter of fact, Madame de Brinvilliers was contemplating making a fresh appeal to the science and resources of Sainte-Croix; and, such being the case, any idea of an open rupture between the two was out of the question.

The lugubrious service which Madame de Brinvilliers was now about to ask from Sainte-Croix was to assist her in getting rid of her two brothers, with a view to profit financially by their deaths. But Sainte-Croix had no personal interest in her brothers' deaths, and he refused to act in association with her as he had done in the matter of her father. He was, however, ready to provide her with the means for poisoning her brothers, on the condition that she would give him a promissory note for thirty thousand francs (20th of April, 1670) in respect to the death of the first brother, and a further note of twenty-five thousand in respect to the death of the second. The Marquise submitted to the conditions, on finding that she was powerless to get them modified—and the Gascon, without even waiting for the promissory notes, at once produced the man who, under the disguise of a valet, would play the active part in the coming drama—for the two brothers lived together.

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It was arranged that Sainte-Croix should prepare the poison, and that Jean Hamelin, the would-be valet, who took the name of La Chaussée, should administer it to the Messieurs d'Aubray ; and the Marquise, under pretence of taking interest in the welfare of her brothers, succeeded in installing La Chaussée as their valet.

It was towards the end of 1669 that La Chaussée took up his duties. Almost from the first, he made himself indispensable to the two brothers, both by the punctuality, quickness, and perfection of his services. So, when in the spring of 1670 the brothers went down to Beauce to pass the Easter vacation, La Chaussée was the only servant they took with them from Paris. Not only did La Chaussée give his customary attention to the personal needs of his masters, but he assisted in the kitchen. One day, when his participation in the preparation of the dinner had been particularly active, all the guests in the dining-room were taken ill. But the Lieutenant de Police was affected more than the others, and from that day he definitely became an invalid. Growing feebler day by day, he finally reached the point when he could no longer stand, and La Chaussée, with the tender care of a mother, used to carry him from one couch to another. It appears, though, that, despite the exemplary patience affected by this very peculiar servant, he was disgusted at the way the matter was dragging, for he complained irascibly to his accomplices : " The old blackguard hangs on like grim death ! I can't imagine when he means to crack up ". However, on the 17th June he knew. The Lieutenant de Police, elder son of the late Monsieur d'Aubray d'Offémont, died from what was believed to be a gastric complaint, aggravated by a tendency to " decline ". His widow, Madame Thérèse Mangot de Villarceau d'Aubray, wept for him, without a suspicion that he had been taken from her by unnatural means. She testified to La Chaussée her gratitude for the devotion he had displayed towards her husband ; and the death caused no remark, as had similarly happened in the matter of the father's death.

Having got rid of the Lieutenant Civil, La Chaussée was enabled to give all his attention to the next Monsieur d'Aubray, the Conseiller au Parlement. He tackled the task at once, and it was not long before the Councillor went the

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same way as his brother. In his turn he took to his bed, and died at the beginning of September, 1670. On this occasion the doctors displayed more perspicacity. They declared that the Councillor had died from poisoning. But who was there to accuse? The relations of the dead man were inconsolable over their loss, and his valet had lavished on him such devotion that, had the poisoner been capable of detection, it was obvious that he would have perceived it. There was nothing to be done but to recompense his devoted servant and to wait, in the hopes that events might bring enlightenment. And this is all that was done. La Chaussée received three-hundred francs as a recompense of his unvarying care—and Justice folded her hands.

However, in proportion to the Marquise de Brinvilliers' success in achieving the crimes which she had planned, so did her difficulties increase. Sainte-Croix had become her master. He had in his possession numbers of her letters, both compromising and amatory—and especially her two promissory notes; and by virtue of such possessions he had the Marquise at his mercy. His power was all the more to be dreaded from the fact that he had made influential friends in every quarter. He was on intimate terms with one of the Canons of Notre-Dame. Monsieur de Tressan, senior chaplain to the King's brother, was his friend. Monsieur de Laune, Councillor at the Châtelet, and Monsieur Bocaget, Professor of Civil Law at the École-de-Droit, reckoned him as being one of the most brilliant men of their circle. Sainte-Croix even thought of negotiating a place at Court. And he had active business-relations with an important personage in the financial world, Monsieur Reich de Penautier, General Treasurer of the Clergy for the States of Languedoc. La Chaussée's demands, in addition to those of Sainte-Croix, increased the Marquise's uneasiness. Finally she had recourse to threats, in her endeavour to get herself free from Sainte-Croix. She gave him to understand that, at the risk of compromising herself, she was prepared to expose him. Sainte-Croix retaliated by attempting to poison her. But he himself had instructed her too well in the past for her to be ignorant of the antidote requisite for the occasion. Having recovered from the attack, Madame de Brinvilliers devised another plan to extricate herself from the source of

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danger which Sainte-Croix had now become. She determined to marry him herself. Once he became her husband, it would be easy for her either to rob him of the casket containing the incriminating papers or to poison him. However, to execute this new plan it would be first of all necessary to get rid of her husband—but that presented but little difficulty to the Marquise. She began immediately to administer poison to her husband, and he took it without any suspicion of the danger that was threatening him. Happily for him, Sainte-Croix, who was not going at any price to marry the Marquise, and who perhaps had also preserved some remnant of friendship for the Marquis, safeguarded his life. He administered antidotes to Monsieur de Brinvilliers as often as the Marquise tried to poison him—five times in all. But such an experience could not leave the Marquis unscathed. It resulted in a loss of power in one of his legs ; but his life was preserved. By this time Madame de Brinvilliers had come to regard the lives of others as of no more importance than a hand of cards, where some are retained and others rejected, just according to whether they may be required or not. In this way, she began to poison her elder daughter, simply because she did not consider her very intelligent. Seized, however, with remorse, she immediately neutralized the poison she had just given her, by making her drink large quantities of milk. Her servant was also treated in the same way by the Marquise, who feared that the girl knew too much about her. Inclined, at times, to drink more than was good for her, the Marquise, when in that condition, had a tendency to talk freely ; and afterwards it seemed only natural to her that those who had been privileged to listen to her secrets should pay with their lives. It is in this category of victims that Briancourt must be placed—that same tutor who the Marquise at a given moment had favoured with her love, and who later on, when condemned by his mistress, owed his life solely to his presence of mind (1671). To save himself from a second attempt, he had no alternative but to move to Aubervilliers, where the Fathers of the Oratory engaged him as an instructor.

However, Nemesis was following in her tracks. On the 31st July, 1672, Gaudin de Saint-Croix died suddenly from an attack of apoplexy in his secret laboratory in the Place

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Maubert. On the news of his death, his creditors hastened to petition that seals should be placed on all his effects. The petition was granted, and all he possessed was sequestered till the 11th of August. The famous casket containing the papers, to obtain which La Brinvilliers would have gladly poisoned any number of people, necessarily received the imprint of the seal. As a matter of fact, it was removed from Sainte-Croix's rooms, and handed over to a police-sergeant for safe custody. The Marquise de Brinvilliers was at Picpus, her place in the country, some miles from the Capital, when these events were happening in Paris. She was warned of them by a man who was as equally upset as herself—that same Reich de Penautier, of whose friendship Sainte-Croix had been so proud. He also had given two promissory notes to Sainte-Croix, one for ten-thousand francs, and the other for two-thousand, dated the 17th of February, 1669—a date significantly close to the one marking the death of Monsieur Hauntyvel, his predecessor at the General Treasury of the Clergy of the States of Languedoc. The rich financier, realizing himself to be in a terrible position, and knowing well how skilful the Marquise was in extricating herself out of difficulties, had hastened to warn her, in his own self-interest, of Sainte-Croix's death and of the sealing up of everything he possessed. In the Marquise, in fact, seemed to lie his only hope of safety. For her part, Madame de Brinvilliers, who was more upset even than Penautier, consoled herself with the thought that, if her own efforts failed to save her, at any rate her association with Penautier in crime would guarantee her head. "If it rains on me", she said, "it will pour on Penautier". But such consolation did not relieve her perturbation, or prevent her in her bewilderment from doing very foolish things. Precipitately leaving Picpus to return to Paris, she most indiscreetly approached all the highly placed people she knew, and endeavoured in a maladroit manner to gain possession of the casket. The only result of such attempts was to attract the attention of the authorities to the matter; and the ultimate outcome was that two persons were made responsible for the safe custody of the casket instead of one.

However, on the 18th of April, 1672, the casket in question was opened. The first thing that the magistrates saw was a



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paper written in Sainte-Croix's handwriting, and drawn up in these terms<sup>1</sup>—"I most humbly beg those into whose hands this casket may fall to do me the favour to be so good as to deliver it into the actual hands of Madame la Marquise de Brinvilliers, residing in the Rue Neuve-Saint-Paul, in that everything it contains concerns her, and belongs to her solely, and, moreover, there is nothing whatsoever within of any use to anyone in the world save to herself, and in case that she may have predeceased me, to burn it and all that it contains, without so much as opening or examining anything therein; and, so that no one should make pretence to misunderstand, I swear by God, Whom I adore, and by all that is most sacred, that I state nothing that is not absolutely the truth. Should perchance anyone contravene these my just and reasonable intentions, in this respect I lay the burthen thereof, both in this world and the next, upon their consciences, and thus disburthen my own, and I declare that this is my last will.

Made at Paris, the 25th of May, 1670.

Signed SAINTE-CROIX."

Directly beneath this expression of Sainte-Croix's wishes they found his confession. Probably from its pages a very complete statement as to the crimes of which Sainte-Croix had been the centre would have been forthcoming; but religious scruples prevented them from reading it, and it was immediately burned. They, however, took possession of some small sealed packets attached to phials of poison, the Marquise's letters, and above all the promissory notes of Madame de Brinvilliers and of Penautier. These documents were so compromising to both of them that they were both summoned before the Justices on the 22nd of August. However, the Court hesitated before charging people of their status with crime; and, while they were still considering the matter, though they had Jean Hamelin, known as La Chaussée, arrested, the Marquise de Brinvilliers, accompanied by one servant, passed over into England.

The Government of Louis XIV took all possible steps to recapture the criminal who had escaped them. Colbert wrote most urgent letters on the subject to his son, the Marquis de

<sup>1</sup> Funck Brentano, *Affaire des Poisons*.

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Croissy, who was at that time French Ambassador in England. The Marquis de Croissy approached Lord Arlington, Secretary of State to Charles II, on the matter; but all that the Ambassador could obtain was an authority for the arrest of the Marquise, which, however, contained a formal clause, to the effect that the English police were not to be employed in the matter. Whereas the French police were not permitted to act in England, the authority, as issued by Charles II, was merely derisory. The English authorities, however, gave the Marquise to understand that they desired her to leave the country—and La Brinvilliers passed over into the Netherlands.

During this time the trial of Hamelin, known as La Chaussée, and his accomplices—in which Dame Thérèse Mangot de Villarceau, widow of the Lieutenant Civil and sister of the Councillor was *partie civile*—was pursuing its course at the Châtelet, Paris. By the sentence delivered on the 24th of March, 1673, La Chaussée was condemned to be "broken alive, and to expire on the wheel", after having been previously put to the torture, both ordinary and extraordinary. The same sentence condemned in contumacy La Dame Brinvilliers to be beheaded. Shattered by the torture, La Chaussée confessed his crimes, before his execution (24th of May, 1673).

In the meantime, Penautier had been pursued by the vengeance of Marie Vossier, Haunyvel's widow, who had accused him of having contrived the poisoning of her husband. But, supported by the weight of the French clergy, the world of finance, and numerous and powerful friends, both belonging to the Court and outside of it, he escaped the arm of the law. On the 26th of July, 1673, sentence was pronounced in his favour.

Monsieur de Brinvilliers, more anxious to derive advantage from his wife's crimes than to cleanse his name from their stain, pushed his effrontery to such a pitch that he actually took possession of the Château d'Offémont, to the detriment of Dame Thérèse d'Aubray, under the pretext that the Château was part of the inheritance of his father-in-law and two brothers-in-law. Louis XIV had himself to write twice (the 22nd of February, and the 30th of March, 1674) before he

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succeeded in making this waster give up a property which he had had the face to claim in the name of crime. In the words of the King's letter he was ordered "to vacate it, together with servants and children, and to hand over the keys to Dame d'Aubray, with interdiction against approaching Offémont within three leagues, under penalty for disobedience . . ."<sup>1</sup>.

Madame de Brinvilliers in the course of her wanderings had met with many difficulties and much suffering. Reduced in her resources, haunted by the fear of being taken, and at times, owing to various complications, finding herself surrounded, she moved on from town to town, wondering each day where she would find refuge on the morrow. In March, 1676, she retired into a convent at Liège. Almost immediately the police of Louis XIV were informed of the fact. Whereas, at the moment, the French troops were occupying a part of the Netherlands as a consequence of the war with Holland, it appeared possible that Madame de Brinvilliers might at last be arrested. It has been asserted that the police-officer, Dugrez, disguised as a Court Abbé, played so well the rôle of the enamoured lover that she walked blindly into a trap that he had laid for her. Probably the real truth is not so romantic. But, howsoever it might have been, towards the end of March or at the beginning of April, 1676, La Brinvilliers was under strong guard at Maestricht, where the Headquarters of the French Army were situated. She attempted first to fascinate her guards, and then to make her escape ; but, having failed in both experiments, she decided that nothing was left to her but suicide. She ate glass, and became very ill. Having recovered, she found some pins, and ate them likewise ; but the pins did not make her even so ill as the glass. Then she tried a third method of suicide, to which the frank and lively pen of Madame de Sévigné has been able to make allusion, but to which an ordinary pen hesitates to refer.<sup>2</sup> But, in spite of everything, Madame de Brinvilliers was compelled to submit to her fate. Louis XIV was so determined that these high-born poisoners should be brought to trial that he himself

<sup>1</sup> *Archives de la Bastille*, tome IV (Quoted by Maître Cornu.)

<sup>2</sup> See *Lettres de Madame de Sévigné* (Edition E. Monmerque), tome IV, 1<sup>o</sup> Page 426 : A Monsieur et Madame de Grignan (29.4.1676) ; 2<sup>o</sup> Page 436 : A Madame de Grignan (6.5.1676).

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personally detailed the magistrates for this particular case. He selected Monsieur de Paluau to be the President of the preliminary inquiry in respect to this great lady by birth, notorious poisoner by reputation.

Monsieur de Paluau met the Marquise de Brinvilliers at Mézières, and began at once his examination of the prisoner. From that moment the position of the accused became parlous. She had against her not only the casket papers of Sainte-Croix, her own flight, and the admissions of La Chaussée, but also the documents of her own casket, which had been seized upon the day of her arrest. This casket contained her own confession, written in her own hand-writing ; and, if it did not comprise all her crimes, it at any rate admitted to the poisoning of Monsieur d'Aubray Offémont and of his two sons, and to an attempt to poison Demoiselle d'Aubray, who was her sister and a Carmelite nun. This confession was not treated with the same delicacy and discretion as had been accorded to Sainte-Croix's. Instead of burning it unread, it was placed in the Marquise's *dossier*, as further evidence as to her crimes. Madame de Brinvilliers had made every effort to recover that incriminating confession—but without result. The Justices had her confession, and intended to utilize it to the utmost. In point of fact, Monsieur de Paluau produced this confession as the first piece of evidence, on the 17th of April, 1676, on the day the examination opened. Every question of the Justice was met by the accused with stubborn silence ; except that she stated she had completely lost all recollection as to the events of which he was speaking. It was not till the last days of April that the Marquise arrived at the Conciergerie.

The trial began almost at once ; but Madame de Brinvilliers challenged the jurisdiction of the Châtelet. In virtue of her rank as Marquise, she claimed the right of being tried by the Grand Chambre and the Chambre de Tournelles in joint assembly. This right was acknowledged, and the trial opened in the presence of the two Chambers, on the 29th April, under the Presidency of Guillaume de Lamoignon, President of the Parliament, with Judge Harley as Attorney-General. At that period the administration of justice was much more restricted than it is to-day. The Marquise de Brinvilliers was not permitted to employ counsel in her defence. All that was

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allowed to accused persons was the employment of "*factums*", that is to say, statements, written on behalf of the accused by barristers engaged for that purpose. Such *factums* were read by the judges ; but the barristers had not the right to expound them by word of mouth. The Marquise had two *factums*, but had to battle with the magistrates and witnesses without assistance. The trial occupied no less than twenty-two sittings. What prolonged it so was the stubbornness of the accused in denying all the acts of poisoning with which she was charged. This woman of forty-six, who had preserved almost the appearance of a woman of thirty, with her soft blue eyes, unfailing politeness, and low musical voice, was very elusive and disconcerting. Despite the numerous documents they had in proof of her guilt, they could not produce a witness who had actually seen her administer the poison or heard her give the order to do so. What was stated in Court, were merely repeated conversations, or words let drop by the Marquise when she was under the influence of drink—and none of them were definite or of direct evidential value. Finally, the ecclesiastical justices, or "*Officiaux*" sent to all the Paris churches letters to be read in the pulpit, whereby it was made a case of conscience to the faithful to inform their priests or magistrates of anything they might know regarding the crimes of La Brinvilliers. But this far-reaching measure had no result. In the meantime, the whole of Paris was deeply moved by the trial. Madame de Sévigné asseverates in one of her letters that much more interest was being taken in it than in the war.

It was Briancourt, the late tutor of the Marquise's children, who extricated the Judges from their difficulty, and helped them to overcome their final hesitations arising from lack of ocular witnesses, and fear lest in her downfall La Brinvilliers might possibly compromise many personages of high rank. Briancourt happened to be at the Conciergerie at that time for some offence which had nothing to do with the Marquise's trial ; and, as a consequence of the love-passages he had once had with the woman, at first he decided to say nothing. But by degrees, recalling more exactly all that he had suffered at her hands, he offered to give evidence. Briancourt knew a great deal, and of first importance concerning the Marquise.

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She had confided in him everything concerning the poisoning of her two brothers—in fact, such confidences on her part had been instrumental in enabling him to prevent her poisoning her sister and her sister-in-law. He had himself been the victim of an attempt at poisoning, through the agency of a certain Bazile, whom Sainte-Croix had introduced to La Brinvilliers. This attempt having failed, the Marquise had twice had recourse to violence to put an end to him, but he had been too astute for her. All this Briancourt had recalled with precision and was able to relate to the Judges, supporting each statement with dates and detail. The first sitting at which he made his depositions was more of the nature of a duel of wits with the accused than an ordinary presentment of evidence. It lasted thirteen hours, and was followed on the next day by a similar experience, lasting five. The Marquise stood up to Briancourt with imperturbable *aplomb* and self-possession. At the third sitting, the 14th of July, Briancourt dissolved into tears, while the Marquise continued in her policy of flat denial—but the Judges had arrived at a definite opinion.

The Attorney-General summed up on the 15th of July. The Marquise was not permitted to be present. He demanded not only that the accused should be beheaded and afterwards burnt, but that, before proceeding to the supreme penalty, she should have her right hand cut off.

However, before the judgment was delivered, the accused had to seat herself on the *sellette*, a little hard wooden stool without a back, which was placed at nearly an equal distance between the Judges and the public, to be interrogated for the last time. According to the Abbé Pirot, who was present with the Marquise till the end, this sitting was the most harrowing of all. Madame de Brinvilliers was more charming and tranquil than on any previous occasion. The deference which she showed to the Judges, the efforts she made to save them trouble, the sweetness of her voice and of her replies so affected the Court that many of those on the Bench wept copiously.

However, after a very long deliberation, judgment was delivered on the 16th of July. It was inflexible in its severity towards the accused, but, as in the case of the Attorney-

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General's summing-up, it was not pronounced in her presence. Madame de Brinvilliers was condemned :

" 1° To do penance in front of the principal church of Paris (Notre-Dame), whither she shall be taken in a dung-cart, with bare feet, a cord round her neck, and holding in her hands a lighted torch, weighing two pounds, and there, on her knees, shall say and declare that out of wickedness and revenge and in order to obtain their property she caused her father and her two brothers to be poisoned, and attempted the life of her deceased sister, for which she now repents, asking pardon from God, the King, and Justice.

2° This done, she shall be taken and conducted in the aforesaid dung-cart to the Place de Grève of this Town, to have her head cut off there on a scaffold, which for this purpose will be erected in the aforesaid place.

3° Previously to that, she shall be put to the torture, both ordinary and extraordinary, in order to make her reveal her accomplices.

4° She shall pay four-thousand francs fine to the King, five-hundred francs for prayers to God for the repose of the souls of her father and her brothers, ten-thousand francs in reparation to the Dame Mangot, widow of the Sieur d'Aubray, Lieutenant civil, partie civile.

5° After the torture she shall be clothed in the long shift of the criminal and exposed to public view.

6° Her body shall be burnt, and its ashes thrown to the winds".

After this sentence had been promulgated, the President of the Court sent for one of the most distinguished priests of the day, the Abbé Edme Pirot, Doctor of the Sorbonne, to ask him to stand by the condemned woman in her last and terrible ordeals. In reality, the task which the magistrate, in the name of Louis XIV, begged him to undertake was of a more difficult nature than would have been involved in the mere offering of the aids and consolations of religion to Madame de Brinvilliers in her last moments. What the King desired, and what the Court was endeavouring to obtain, was a true and complete confession on the part of the poisoner of all her criminal relations and actions, so as to permit of the guilty being punished and the evil attacked

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at its source. The Abbé Pirot was averse from such an undertaking. He was a sensitive and fastidious man, who shrank from physical suffering, and who had to exert all his strength of will to prevent himself from fainting at the sight of human blood. He was of fine intelligence, well-read, and a good preacher, and he had an acute and penetrating mind ; but his whole nature prompted him to refuse the service offered him by President Lamoignon. But the magistrate pointed out to him that he had exactly the qualities requisite for such a task, and that it was the duty of every good subject to serve his King to the utmost of his powers. The Abbé Pirot allowed himself to be persuaded ; and it is probably his extreme sensitiveness and humanity that is responsible for the presentment of an almost sublime *de Brinvilliers* on the 16th and 17th July, 1676, such as is depicted in the one-hundred-and-fifty manuscript pages of the Abbé. Probably all the facts he relates are true ; but is it not also probable that the great dissembler, who had deceived her father, her brothers, and it is impossible to say how many more, in the same manner deceived the Abbé Pirot, by giving him the impression that she was moved solely by virtue and a sense of repentance, when in reality the actress within her was merely making the best of a situation which she realized to be irretrievable ? The Abbé Pirot, on leaving the President, at once put himself into contact with the prisoner. Both morally and physically she seems to have impressed him. The sweet blue eyes of the Marquise had the same effect on him as they had had on everyone who had seen her ; and the Abbé states that the great preoccupation of the woman that evening was the fact that the next day happened to be a fast-day of the Church. She fully realized what the next day had in store for her, but the Abbé heard her say to the jailor : " Although to-morrow may be a day of great fatigue to me, I do not intend to eat any meat ", and he writes, " all that she desired was her broth—perhaps a little stronger than usual." On the advice of the Abbé, Madame *de Brinvilliers* writes to her husband a letter both dignified and tender. The Abbé then attempts to ascertain if the prisoner be sufficiently instructed in her religion, and to his great astonishment he finds the prisoner's ignorance on all religious



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matters to be almost complete. He then gives her some religious instruction, at the same time pointing out to her that if she desire to die as a Christian, and as one who is anxious to make good so far as possible the evil she has done, she must disclose everything in connection with her crimes and accomplices, and declare all she knows as to the various poisonings throughout the kingdom. Madame listens with a strained attention to everything appertaining to the religious instruction she receives. She endeavours to rectify all the deficiencies of her education in this respect ; and, had anyone witnessed this first interview between her and the Abbé Pirot, he would naturally have believed himself to have been in the presence of a neophyte burning with enthusiasm for her new religion, instead of an accused woman who knew that on the following day she was to hear her own sentence of death.

The Abbé quitted the prisoner about nine in the evening. Father Chevigny of The Oratory took his place, and remained with the Marquise. Madame de Brinvilliers displayed much distress at the departure of the Abbé Pirot, but did not evince a trace of impatience or anger in respect to what was to happen on the morrow. At seven o'clock on the morning of the 17th she was taken from her cell and conducted to the Chamber of Torture, where her sentence of death was to be read to her. She spoke quite calmly, and with no sign of fear, when she replied that she was quite ready to listen to the reading. She gave the deepest attention to it, and several times she begged in the politest and most courteous manner that they would be so good as to repeat some word or phrase which she regretted not having quite understood—and each time she thanked them, when they acceded to her request.

When the reading of the sentence was concluded, Madame de Brinvilliers, in obedience probably to the advice of the Abbé Pirot on the evening before, turned to Monsieur de Paluau, and informed him that she desired to confess all she knew in connection with the poisonings. "I wish to make this confession", she said, "not with any intention of avoiding the torture, but merely out of a sense of duty". Then the Marquise confessed to having given poison to her father, twenty-eight to thirty times, with her own hand ; and to

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having caused La Chaussée to poison her brothers, after trying several different poisons. There was one that reddened water, and another, that did not affect its natural colour. She also confessed that she had given poison five times to her husband. But the confession failed to disclose to the law any unknown poisoners. The condemned woman did mention one name that had not been mentioned in the trial—that of Fouquet. But Fouquet had for a long time past been imprisoned at Pignerol, where he had been as powerless to harm anyone by poison as he had been to peculate.

On the conclusion of her confession, the condemned woman was conducted to the executioners to be submitted to the torture, ordinary and extraordinary. Madame de Sévigné says that at the sight of the three huge buckets of water, which were standing ready prepared for the torture, the Marquise called out brightly and wittily: "They must be going to drown me! Considering my size, it is impossible to believe that they expect me to drink all that". The torture lasted till one o'clock in the afternoon, when the condemned woman was again handed over to the Abbé Pirot. Then, after several hours of conversation, came the painful process of dressing for the public exposure. More than fifty persons were present at the unhappy woman's humiliation. Among them was the Comtesse de Soissons, who one day would also have to fly from France under the threat of being accused of poisoning—and there was also Mademoiselle de Scudéry, whose conversation and writings had so little relation to events of such dramatic moment.

Finally came the moment when she started out to receive the supreme penalty. The whole severity of the sentence was applied to the condemned woman, who soon, however, submitted to the sufferings and the full shame of her position with a resignation that was particularly moving to the Abbé Pirot. But the first movement of the poisoner had been one of anger and revolt—and probably it is at that moment that Lebrun caught the expression of her face, explaining why his portrait of La Brinvilliers, to-day, is known in the art-world under the name of "Indignation".

After having done penance, Madame de Brinvilliers had to wait for half-an-hour on the scaffold, with her head on the

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block, in consequence of the headsman being late for the execution. During that time the unfortunate woman repeated, with scrupulous exactness and devotion, the prayers with which the Abbé Pirot inspired her. Finally the headsman did his work, and the criminal's little head fell from under the axe. Immediately afterwards, head and body were taken to the wood-pile, where they were burnt (17th of July, 1676). Madame de Sévigné, who had not succeeded in actually seeing the execution but whose heart had beaten in unison with that of the crowd, wrote on the following day: "At last it is over—La Brinvilliers is in the air. After the execution, her poor little body has been thrown on to an enormous fire, so that we are now all inhaling her, and by means of tiny spirits we shall be seized with a mania for poisoning which will astonish everybody".

Was Madame de Sévigné right, and were these "tiny spirits" proceeding from the body of La Brinvilliers, responsible a few years later for the fact that Paris was again to be involved in the horrors of a poisoning trial, of an even greater tragedy than that of La Brinvilliers? Or does the quotation on the title-page of Hugh Stocke's book *Madame de Brinvilliers and her Times*—which appeared in 1912—explain the number of poisonings there were in France towards the end of the seventeenth century? This quotation from Bussy Rabutin was: "The source of all these crimes was love, and, after that, what the Romans called *auri sacra fames*" (lust for gold). Neither explanation appears to be sufficient.

When one remembers how greatly this country admired its King, even down to his weaknesses, one is justified in considering that such weaknesses must share, to a certain extent, responsibility for the crimes of the people. A religion, that taught that a fault confessed was already pardoned, and a casuistry that deliberately distorted the intention, in order to sever it from its own action, have also a direct bearing on these tragedies. All the poisoners confessed their crimes to a priest, after having committed them—but it did not prevent them from beginning again. Finally, Quietism itself, which enjoined a complete reliance on the love of God, however criminal one might be, has perhaps

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also brought a dangerous influence to bear on unregulated temperaments, such as believed that the love of God would cleanse them from all their crimes. But, dominating all these causes leading to the same result, there is ambition, which inflames men and women to such a point that it stifles reason, and makes them tolerant of crime. At a certain level such ambition possibly does resolve itself into a lust for gold ; but in high positions it becomes a passion for power and honours, and is capable of committing any crime.



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[1644-1710]

During the summer of 1661 Louis XIV's Court at Fontainebleau was the lightest-hearted, most enjoyable, and most distinguished Court in Europe. The King, whom Mazarin's death on the 8th of March, 1661, had liberated from all restraint, had joyfully taken full advantage of his youth and passion for pleasure. His sister-in-law, the brilliant Henriette d'Angleterre, Duchesse d'Orléans, assisted him in organizing ballets, water-parties, hunts, and rides, such as made Fontainebleau a place of enchantment; and out of this mutual co-operation a passionate friendship arose between the two. Both of them, animated by the same tastes, sympathies, and ideas, found it delightful to organize and enjoy their amusements together, and finally they reached a point when it became difficult for them to conceive of happiness except in each other's society. But it was not long before this intimate friendship, which was only too obvious to everybody, began to irritate the Duc d'Orléans, who, though he bore no love for his wife, was none the less jealous and tyrannical in the exercise of a husband's rights. The pious Queen-Mother, Anne of Austria, also was disturbed by a friendship which certainly bore a close resemblance to love. The young Queen Marie-Thérèse, too, was jealous about it; and, though she was much too timid to complain about it to the King, she wept bitterly without attempting to conceal the reason for her tears. Neither Louis XIV nor the Duchesse d'Orléans could possibly remain unaware of so grave a weight of displeasure; and so, with a view to appease it, Madame—as Henriette was usually called—conceived the idea of always having a third person with her when the King was present. Thenceforth, there were to be no more *têtes-à-têtes* with the King, neither in their talks, nor drives, nor in the forest, nor anywhere. To this purpose, she looked

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amongst her Ladies-of-Honour for some young person of sympathetic and timid disposition to keep always beside her, and so, as it were, to play propriety. The Duchess decided that this person had to be timid, so as to ensure that her presence would in no way affect her own customary relations with the King. So her choice fell on Louise-Françoise la Baume de la Vallière, more generally known to the Court and by posterity under the name of Louise de la Vallière.

Louise de la Vallière had entered the Court by a side-door. Deprived of her father at an early age, without a penny to her name, and belonging to the *très petite noblesse*, she had proved more an embarrassment to her mother than a comfort. The latter, on becoming a widow, had attempted to safe-guard her existence by a second marriage, and then, after a second widowhood, by a third. And it was this third husband, who was Head Steward in the Household of the uncle of the Duc d'Orléans, the husband of Henriette d'Angleterre, who had succeeded in obtaining for Louise de la Vallière the post of Maid-of-Honour to the young Duchess. At that time Louise was only sixteen-and-a-half, having been born at Reugny (Touraine) in August, 1644; and the only thing that could be said about her was that she was very sweet, very modest, very humble, and very good. All these characteristics convinced the Duchesse d'Orléans that Louise was the ideal third person for whom she was looking. The young Maid-of-Honour thereupon became the attendant-in-ordinary to the Duchess, accompanying her in all her walks and talks and meetings with the King. As Henriette had foreseen, the attitude of Louise was so modest and so retiring that her presence was scarcely noticeable.

Nevertheless, however modest Louise de la Vallière might be, she had no power to suppress the very real and subtle charm of her personality. Her very sweet blue eyes became naturally tender when they paused for a moment to glance at anyone with whom she was in sympathy. Her fair, *cendré* hair added to the sweet and caressing expression of her face. Her charming little head was refined and attractive. Her flower-like complexion was possibly the most delicate in all the Court. Louise had no trace of commanding



LOUISE-FRANÇOISE LA BAUME  
Duchess of La Vallière





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beauty, but her dainty little face, with its refinement, delicacy, sincerity, sweetness and fascination, had an infinite charm—and it was not long before Louis XIV came under its influence. He became, in fact, vividly interested in the young girl with whom he always came into touch whenever he met Madame. He perceived her to be ingenuous, sincere, intrinsically good, and innocent as to all the underhand practices of the Court and intrigues of the world. He felt that for the first time he had come into contact with a fresh young heart capable of a passion as great as it was disinterested. As time went on, he openly showed his interest in her, even before the Duchess. He wanted her to take a part in the *Ballet des Saisons*, which they were just beginning to rehearse, and undertook himself to instruct her in the mysteries of the histrionic arts.

As for Louise, she had only to see the King to adore him. From the first moment he had crossed her path she had been seized with one of those consuming passions such as are prepared to make all sacrifices, save the renunciation of the object of their love. Every little attention that Louis XIV paid to her partook of the nature of an infinite joy. On the evening of the representation of the *Ballet des Saisons*, she was so stimulated by the recollection of all the trouble the King had taken to perfect her in her rôle of nymph that she had a real success—though necessarily a modest one compared with the brilliant triumph which Henriette d'Angleterre obtained in her rôle of the Huntress Diana. The King in this ballet took the part of Spring, and Louise thought that she had never before seen him look so beautiful and charming, and throughout the fête she was haunted by the consciousness of his presence and the love she bore him. All through the next day she continued to experience the tremendous emotions that had been aroused in her the evening before—and in the evening she sat beside one of the ornamental bushes in the park, dreaming still of the wondrous Spring-time King. While there, one of her companions joined her and asked her whom she thought best in the ballet of the previous evening. "I saw no one but the King", replied Louise, with her natural sincerity of manner. This frank and significant avowal was heard by Louis XIV him-

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self. Without Louise knowing it, he had been standing on the other side of the bush, having been attracted to it by the sight of the young Maid-of-Honour.

From that moment the King had no further doubt as to the nature of Louise's feelings towards him, and he no longer attempted to resist her fascinations. He determined to make this pretty child, whose passionate love was so obvious despite the modesty of her demeanour, the lady of his thoughts, the mistress of his heart, and the fairy-goddess of his Court. Louise, whose whole being was burning with the most ardent love for the King, made no resistance to his advances. She had no other desire but to please him—and so it came about that, though she had only joined the Court in May, by the following July, he had taken her to his heart. The young King, entranced by the sincerity and intensity of Louise's feelings towards him, loved her as he had never loved before, and was never to love again. He showed himself jealous of the smallest attention she might pay to anyone but himself. One day a painter of renown who was staying at the Court requested Louise to allow him to paint her in the costume of a nun. The artist considered that the sweet face of the Maid-of-Honour, with its look of purity and calm, would so set off the costume that it would make a picture of irresistible attraction. Louise refused the painter's request; but a young lord of the Court, who secretly admired Mademoiselle de la Vallière, welcomed the pretext of doing a good turn to the artist, in order to get possession of her portrait—and he made such a point of it to Louise that she finally yielded, on the understanding that the young lord would defray all expenses. When Louis XIV became acquainted with the fact, he was so incensed with the young lord that he summoned him immediately to his cabinet, and ordered him to leave the Court that same day. Later on, too, when he learned that Fouquet had dared to make Mademoiselle de la Vallière a declaration of affection, accompanied by offers of money, he vowed against him an unquenchable hatred. It is possible, indeed, that the disgrace and imprisonment of Fouquet were as much due to the jealousy of Louis XIV as to the malpractices of the discredited *surintendant*.

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In the meantime, the happiness of Louise, though loved by the King whom she adored, was not wholly without alloy. Two passions of almost equal force were warring in her heart—God and the King. When she was with the King, his fascination was so complete, her love for him so great, that nothing beyond it seemed of any account. But, when Louis XIV was absent, the loving girl, in the full consciousness of her guilt, would experience fits of heart-rending remorse. Alone, and kneeling before her crucifix, she would pour out her grief to God for so gravely offending Him, imploring and supplicating Him to grant her pardon for her sinful mode of life—and, with her whole body shaken by sobs, she would crave for mercy. Often Louise would pass hours, even half the night, in this prostrate condition. But, even in the depth of her remorse she could not regret that she loved the King. There was one sacrifice she could not make, which she had not the courage even to consider—that she should renounce the King's love. But, to do penance for her fault, she was ready to submit to any humiliation, to any suffering. And for that reason she continued in the service of the Duchesse d'Orléans. She even experienced a sense of gratitude to the Princess for her displays of temper and for the wounding allusions the Duchess would let fall, when she remembered how this attendant of hers had robbed her of the King's heart. But Louise desired nothing beyond the joy of being loved by Louis XIV. She wanted neither title, honours, nor wealth. To await the King, to greet him, to lavish on him all her love—that was her sole thought throughout each day. And the mere fact that he came rendered her ambition absolutely complete. So much was this the case that Louise was quite miserable, on the occasion of the splendid entertainment at Vaux given by Fouquet to his King, when Louis XIV's attentions to her that day gave official confirmation to the fact, that she had complete possession of his heart.

It was, however, due to one of these visits of the King, which Louise de la Vallière so anxiously awaited, that her love became submerged in its first great sorrow. From the beginning of their liaison, the two young lovers had promised never to conceal anything from one another. One day, one

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of Louise de la Vallière's friends, a Maid-of-Honour to the Duchesse d'Orléans like herself, confided to her something concerning her own love-affairs, in which the young Duchess was in some way mixed up. What it exactly was is not known; but her friend made her faithfully promise to say nothing about it to anyone. To this Louise very regretfully agreed. But when, that evening, the King arrived, she felt very troubled. It was the first time that there had ever been a secret between them. Although this secret concerned someone else, her frank and simple nature was so upset that she could not conceal it. Louis XIV knew at once that she was keeping something back from him, and he insisted on knowing what it was. Louise then admitted to him that she had been told a secret in confidence, but that she had promised faithfully not to repeat it. The King, accustomed as he was to brook no opposition to his sovereign will, was not deterred by this promise, and definitely ordered her to tell him what it was. The young girl felt that she could not break her word; and the King, irritated by the gentle steadfastness of his mistress, left her, without saying one word to soften the suddenness of his departure. Louise remained overwhelmed. For a long time she waited for her lover to return. Had they not promised one another, some months before, that should any difference arise between them that they would never let a night pass before having made it up? But on this occasion the whole night passed by, and Louis did not return—and Louise in the desolation of her heart and a prey to the torment of her secret remorse, stole from the Court, and fled to the Convent of Chaillot. Arriving there, she asked for the Mother Superior, and on seeing her threw herself on her knees, and begged her to receive her into the convent, to allow her to expiate her sins. And then, at the sight of the great ivory Christ which decorated the bare parlour walls, Louise sank on to the stones, and, weeping bitterly, with outstretched arms, poured forth the full fervour of her soul—mingled, it must be owned, with the full sorrow of her heart.

She was still in this posture of passionate penitence when the King, on the following morning, accompanied by Colbert, came and asked for her at the convent. When Louis XIV

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had heard of her flight, he had realized how inexpressibly dear she was to him, and his first impulse had been to follow her, and to bring her back, and shelter her with his love. But he had been compelled to wait till the following morning. And on that morning, even, he had had to receive the Spanish Ambassadors before he could start—but he had finally left the Court and, to the great disapproval of the Queen-Mother, without hearing Mass. Louise's joy at the sight of her lover was intense. Once again the King turned her heart from God, and Louise returned to the Court, overflowing with gratitude and passion for her beloved.

During that same year, 1662, the first Lent which Bossuet conducted at the Court was a fresh source of suffering to Louise. In the first rank of the faithful, she followed with piety and assiduity the plain and downright sermons of the young ecclesiastical orator; and one day, when she was sitting in the chapel not far from the King, she heard the powerful and vibrating voice of Bossuet, as he turned towards the King, give him from the height of the pulpit an instruction, which was tantamount to the dismissal of the Favourite. "It is in the heart of Kings", Bossuet was saying, "that the Divine Word has to produce a salutary destruction, by the breaking of all idols and the overthrowing of all altars, raised to the worship of the created instead of the Creator." Louise, in her heart of hearts, knew that Bossuet was right. But, though she might beat her breast as a sinner making full avowal of the truth, and though she might bewail again and again the enormity of her sin, she continued to pray fervently to God to preserve her the King's love.

And her love expanded day by day. The time came when Louis XIV could not endure the idea of his beloved remaining in the service of the Duchess. He installed her at Versailles, where he had already determined to surpass all the splendours of his reign; and in 1663 he summoned Molière to organize there a fête in honour of La Vallière. And the immortal playwright wrote for the occasion *Les Plaisirs de l'Île Enchantée*. This fairy-world of Versailles lasted for three consecutive days, and was accompanied by magnificent processions and all sorts of gallant and costly festivities, the

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unique object of which was to glorify the enchantress of the place—the gentle and loving Louise de la Vallière.

In the midst of these triumphs, Louise was frightened at the greatness thrust upon her. She begged the King to do less for her, to permit her to remain more in the background ; and the more he continued to do her honour, the more she sought refuge in her own humility. None of the honours which he accorded her had the power to move her, as did the reproaches he made to her one day when he had seen her talking with her brother, whom he mistook for a possible admirer. In 1666 Louise gave birth to a daughter, *Maiselle de Blois*, the elder of the two children who were to survive out of the four she had by Louis XIV. Louis recognized the gift by creating her a Duchess—but the title sadly perturbed Louise. Madame de Sévigné, who knew better than anyone the gossip of the Court and Town, was to refer to this point later on, with all her customary shrewdness of perception. "Intrigue was impossible", she wrote, "to that little violet, hiding amid the grass—she who was equally ashamed at being either Mistress, mother, or Duchess. We shall never see her like again." The following year, 1667, was marked by the birth of a son, whom Louis XIV legitimized as had already been done in the case of the girl, creating him Duc de Vermandois.

However, at the time of the birth of this child the brightest days of La Vallière's enchantment had already passed. The happiness she derived from loving the King, and in being equally loved by him in return, was already threatened by an all-conquering and triumphant beauty who had lately dawned on the Court. This beautiful woman, who was as *tonnante* as La Vallière was modest, had fascinated the King. Her name was Françoise-Athénaïs de Rochechouart Mortemart, Marquise de Montespan. At first Louis XIV had no idea of his admiration for her affecting in any way his tender devotion for Louise—but La Vallière, herself, soon realized that the King's love for her was on the wane. What seven years before the malicious remarks of the Duchesse d'Orléans had been unable to effect, the radiant charms of the Marquise de Montespan now did without an effort. Her faultless figure emphasized the slight lameness

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from which La Vallière suffered ; her dazzling complexion invited comparison with Louise's somewhat worn and faded appearance ; and the sparkling wit of the Mortemarts, which was so conspicuous when she talked, was a reminder that Louise seldom spoke, and in whatsoever way she might lavish her love and devotion on the King, it was impossible to recall on her part even a suggestion of wit, or one original phrase, that she had ever uttered. Compared to the woman whose beauty was irresistible, Louise's charms began to lose their power. She realized, better than anyone, her own defects ; but she loved the King so intensely that the idea that another might replace her appeared incredible. So she actively entered the lists against her rival, to compete for the love that was her whole life. She had the courage to appear in public by the side of the Marquise, and, like her, to follow Louis XIV in his Flanders' campaign ; but the struggle was unequal between a Mistress, who had known the wear and tear of remorse and fear, and love, and a young woman whose sole passion was ambition. The people who came to line the roads to admire the royal procession returned saying : " We have seen three Queens "—for Marie-Thérèse was also of the party—" one was sad, one was sweet, and one was extremely beautiful ". Louis held the same opinion as the people, and, just because Louise was so sweet and good, he submitted her to a veritable torture—by making her share her meals with Madame de Montespan, and even her own bedroom, in an attempt to conceal his real conduct from the world. Thus, not only had Louise lost the King's love but she had become fully aware of his relations with Madame de Montespan. She suffered intensely—and finally, after two years of unceasing disappointment and unhappiness, she left the Court for the second time, in 1671, and for the second time went and sought refuge and pardon in the Convent. This time Louis XIV did not go to fetch her back—but he sent Colbert for her ; and, as she was returning with him, she said to him : " It was your master who came for me, in person, in 1662 ".

After her second return to the Court, the life of Louise de la Vallière became unendurable. Her sufferings excited the pity of all who knew her. Queen Marie-Thérèse herself,



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who at one time had been so jealous of her, now pitied her, and bewailed her sorrow. Bossuet, who was well acquainted with the strain of greatness and nobility in her character, exhorted her to break her chains, and to seek her freedom in giving herself to God. The Maréchal de Bellefonds joined his exhortations to those of Bossuet. But Louise, though neglected and humiliated, could not make up her mind never more to see the King. "Leaving the Court for the cloister will not cause me pain", she wrote to the Maréchal de Bellefonds, in 1674, "but never again to speak to the King, oh! that will be my torture!"—and again: "This importunate memory of mine, which I long to silence, distracts me unceasingly, condemning me to endless struggles"; and, yet again: "I quit the world, without regret—but not without pain". Louise was lacerated by these struggles, till the beginning of April, 1674, when, ashamed of her own weakness, she decided to make the great sacrifice, and asked permission from the King to enter the Carmel. Louis XIV granted it to her at once, and the departure of the unhappy woman was fixed for the 20th of April. Louise could not refrain from emotion and regret when quitting the Court. She was only twenty-nine—and she had imagined that the King would always love her! A large gathering accompanied her to the carriage, which was to take her to the convent, and many of them wept when bidding her adieu. On re-entering Carmel, Louise threw herself at the feet of the Mother Superior. "My mother", she said, "I have made so bad a use of my life that I now consign it to your care, never intending to take it back". She at once had her hair cut off, and asked, as a special favour, to be clothed immediately in the religious habit, in spite of the physical suffering she had to endure owing to the flat-footed shoe on her lame foot. She also desired to sleep on the bare ground, and to wear hair-cloth instead of linen. From the following day she worked with ardour and assiduity, breaking off only to read, and to pray. No matter how severe might be her fastings, or rigorous her silence, she confided to the Superior that it was beyond her powers to mortify herself as much as she desired. Then, on her entreaty, the Mother-Superior accorded her permission to help the lay-sisters in their

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roughest and most laborious duties. Later on, she was to be permitted to take out of her short hours of sleep, two extra hours for prayer each morning. Each new mortification, each fresh sacrifice, seemed to Louise a blessing from God.

It was on the 3rd of July, 1675, that she took her final vows, under the name of Sœur Louise de la Miséricorde. Queen Marie-Thérèse herself placed the black veil on Sœur Louise; and it was Bossuet who pronounced the discourse on her taking the veil. The chapel of the Carmel, which was usually so quiet and simple, was on that day filled with all the ladies of the Court, many of whom were weeping. The Duchesse de Longueville was so moved that she could not check her sobs throughout the ceremony. "What did you see, and what do you see now?" asked Bossuet. "What was her condition, and what is it now?" Yet, while he was speaking, Sœur Louise, at length purged from sin, was thanking God for His goodness, and promising Him to make herself day by day less unworthy of His mercy. And thenceforth everything relating to the Court and the world ceased to have any interest for her. That is why she begged Queen Marie-Thérèse not to suggest exceptional hours for people to visit her—including even her brother. And it is also the reason why she so many times refused to see the great ladies who came to visit her.

However, she saw Madame de Sévigné for two hours; and one day Madame de Montespan, accompanied by Madame de Maintenon, paid a call on her in the parlour! Louise de la Miséricorde met the Marquise without discomfort, and spoke to her in tones of infinite sweetness. Madame de Montespan was greatly struck with her calm and sweetness; and perhaps it was the memory of it that brought her again to the Carmel, when, threatened in her turn with dismissal, she came to ask the advice of Sœur Louise de la Miséricorde. But Sœur Louise could not understand why she should be unhappy at leaving the King, unless she loved him, and failed to grasp why she herself should be asked to give advice.

In 1683 Sœur Louise, pursuing in reverence her penitence and mortification of the flesh, was subjected to a further trial—her son, the Duc de Vermandois had been killed in the war. Bossuet had hastened to the Carmel to help to

## LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE

ease her grief. But his first words of sympathy were met by Sœur Louise with the quiet remark : " It is for the birth of this child I should weep, rather than for his death." And so Louise worked to the suppression of all emotion, save the desire for expiation.

For the space of thirty-six years, she was accorded the unfailing admiration of her sisters in religion, by her courage, strength under suffering, sweetness, humility, goodness, and self-abnegation. It was her sad lot, too, to have to join to the sufferings of the cloister, those which were caused by the misfortunes which fell on the country at the end of the great reign. But on the morning of the 4th of June, 1710, when the Carmelites entered the chapel for the purpose of attending matins, they found Sœur Louise lying in a faint on the stone floor. She was carried into her cell, and her daughter, the Princesse de Conti, was immediately summoned. But Louise did not recognize her. She passed quietly to God, having already gained the reputation of a great saint. During the two days that her body lay behind the wrought-iron gates of the choir of the Carmel chapel, an immense crowd came with their chaplets, medals, and all sorts of objects of piety, which they desired should be placed, for a moment, in contact with the " Saint ". Four nuns could scarcely keep pace with the requirements of the people. And so the prayers of the dead woman were granted—she, who had once been a subject for scandal, was, in her death, regarded as a source of pious edification.

## MADAME DE LA FAYETTE

[1634-1693]

Marie-Magdeleine Pioche de la Vergne, daughter of Aymard de la Vergne *Maréchal-de-Camp* and of Marie Pena—descendant of an old Provençale family—was born in Paris on the 18th of March, 1634. The parents of the little girl, although of good family, did not belong to the *grande noblesse*—for the mother was called “*demoiselle*”, instead of “*dame*”—a fact that made her father anxious to provide her with influential god-parents. He selected his own two personal patrons, Maréchal de Brézé and Madame d'Aquesseau, who both held the child at the baptismal font of Saint-Sulpice. And so, from her earliest days, the quality of tact entered into the life of Marie-Magdeleine—and it was to continue so throughout her career.

This charming and talented woman would never have occupied the place she did at Court and in society, had she not been naturally gifted with this quality of tact; and such quality was to gain for her what her secondary rank in life could never have done, the right to *dictate*—though her success in the world was never to make Marie-Magdeleine a happy woman. She comes down to us as one whose life was always tinged with melancholy, whether we view her as a young girl, as a friend, or as an author.

As a young girl, Marie-Magdeleine had the misfortune to lose her father when she was only sixteen. He left her only fairly well off; and Madame de Vergne, though very fond of her, was not the woman to sacrifice her own happiness for her child. In fact, only a few months after Monsieur de la Vergne's death the widow consoled herself for her loss by responding to the ardent declarations of Renaud de Sévigné. Renaud de Sévigné, uncle of the Marquis de Sévigné and Knight of Malta, did not belie the brave and amorous traditions of his race. After covering himself with glory as a Knight of Malta, he asked to be relieved

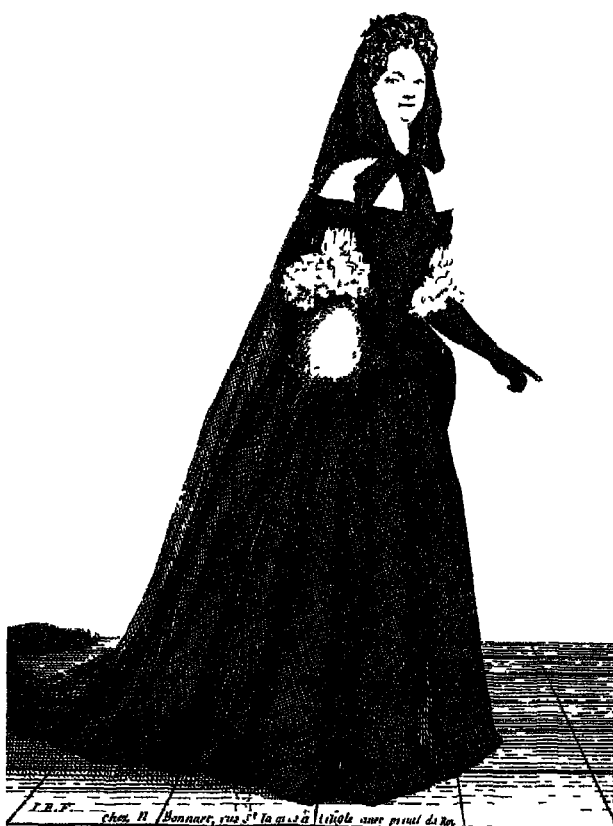
## MADAME DE LA FAYETTE

from his vows, to enable him to marry Madame de la Vergne, whom he loved to distraction. But Marie-Magdeleine de la Vergne herself had not been wholly indifferent to this polished cavalier, and it is said that, on the day that he obtained her mother's hand, she was not only somewhat astonished but distinctly upset. The gazetteers of the time made fun of the incident, and were cruel enough to lampoon it.

" But the charming little girl  
Felt her head all in a whirl,  
Being ready to aver,  
That the fête would be for her,  
That a widow could not hope  
With youth and loveliness to cope,  
And that a girl with eyes like stars  
Was worth twice twenty fat mammas ".<sup>1</sup>

This particular chagrin, moreover, was not the only one her mother caused her. Out of thoughtlessness and imprudence, and conceivably a predilection for presents, the new Madame de Sévigné permitted the Cardinal de Retz to make love to the girl, when the family was at Angers. The Cardinal had gone there for political reasons, and no sooner did he see the young girl than he became very attracted by her. He thought her pretty and most amiable. But it was all to no purpose that the seductive Cardinal displayed his charms and graces in his effort to win her. She remained absolutely unmoved ; which did not, however, prevent Bussy Rabutin's mischievous tongue from pouncing on the incident, and converting it to the use of his own scandal-loving imagination. He and the Prince de Conti amused themselves by designing a map of the love-affairs of the great ladies of the time. They called it " The Map of the Realm of Madcaps ", and the names of ladies took the place of the names of towns. Marie-Magdeleine had the vexation of seeing her own name on it, coupled with a very unkind reference to the matter of Cardinal de Retz, to which Bussy and Conti had also seen fit to add the name of the Duc de Brissac, Governor of Angers.

<sup>1</sup> " *Mais cette charmante mignonne  
En témoigne un peu de courroux,  
Ayant cru, pour être fort belle,  
Que la fête serait pour elle,  
Que les filles fraîches et neuves  
Se doivent préférer aux veuves,  
Et qu'un de ces tendrons charmanis  
Vaut mieux que quarante mamans.*"



MARIE-MADELEINE PIOCHE DE LA VERGNE  
Comtesse de La Fayette



## MADAME DE LA FAYETTE

It was all to no purpose, that the young girl had devoted herself with ardour to the study of Latin under the direction of Ménage and of Rapin ; had shown herself so clever that, after three months' instruction, she was reported to know more than her masters ; and had plunged so deeply into the study of literature as to be able to give a better definition than anyone of the iambic and the trochee—she nevertheless resented keenly an attack of such a detestable nature. She suffered on its account so much the more because her mother was out of sympathy with her, her matrimonial chances were precarious, and, anxious as she was to establish herself in life by a wise and suitable match, she saw no suitors for her hand in sight.

At twenty-two Marie-Magdeleine de la Vergne had never once received an offer of marriage. In the meantime, however, her friends all around her had married when between sixteen and eighteen. What was the reason why Marie-Magdeleine, at the age of twenty-two, had never had an offer of marriage ? In the first place she was poor, and, under the *ancien régime*, the lack of a dowry caused more girls to take the veil than did any actual vocation ; while even in our own times we have numbers of girls, more charming than Marie-Magdeleine, who are compelled to remain old maids. For it is quite an open question whether Marie-Magdeleine had any claims to good-looks. Of course the gazetteers had to make her pretty, in order to give more pungency to their little anecdote, and Cardinal de Retz, as a clever man, was probably more attracted by general expression than actual features. Existing portraits of Marie de la Vergne show her to have had a broad face, drooping cheeks, heavy chin, and a very ordinary looking nose, though her eyes suggest that they may have had beauty. But the general impression remaining is that Mademoiselle de la Vergne could not have been pretty—which explains up to a certain point the absence of admirers in her first youth.

Neither was she demonstrative, or given to enthusiasm. She knew how to conceal her strongest feelings under so severe a restraint that they were never even suspected. A French poet, Jean Moréas, expresses this idea with some humour when he says that she knew how " to put water in her wine ". She



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was called by her contemporaries "the fog", because they felt that they could never find their way into the really intimate compartments of her character. And her reserve, coldness of temperament—at any rate to all outward appearance—lack of vitality, and enthusiasm certainly also contributed to keep young men at a distance from Mademoiselle de la Vergne. Her master, Ménage, who was in love with all his pupils and with Mademoiselle de la Vergne in particular, consecrated to her in his collection of *Poemata* more than forty poems, complaining, under the name of Ménalque, of her inexorable cruelty, and of the coldness with which she rewarded his own transports of devotion.

However, through the kind intervention of friends, Marie-Magdeleine de la Vergne became acquainted with François Mortier, Comte de la Fayette, Seigneur de Prades ; and she married him on the 15th of February, 1655. The marriage was not approved by everybody. The husband bordered on the forties, while the wife was only twenty-two. The gazettes treated the union with ridicule. The Comte was lampooned, and held up to derision. His retiring and prosaic character was such as to condemn him from the first to play second fiddle. And the question is permissible as to whether La Bruyère were not thinking of Monsieur de la Fayette when he wrote : " There is a type of woman who extinguishes her husband to such an extent that he is never mentioned. It even becomes a matter of doubt whether he be dead or alive. Except that he be the father of her children, he is assuredly the wife—and she is the husband ".

Nevertheless, the commencement of their union seems to have been a happy one. Monsieur de la Fayette took his young wife into Auvergne, the province where his estate was situated, and to which he was particularly devoted ; and from Auvergne Madame de la Fayette wrote to her ever-enamoured Latin professor, Ménage : " The care that I take of my house gives me much occupation and enjoyment ; and as, in addition, I have no troubles—my husband adores me, I am very fond of him, and I am absolute mistress of everything—I can assure you that the life I am leading is a very happy one ". It is to be noticed, however, that Madame de la Fayette refers to her house before mentioning her husband ;

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and that, though she says that Monsieur de la Fayette adores her, she does not add that she adores him too. Without doubt, she writes: "I am very fond of him", but could she have well said less? Despite the fact that two sons were born to Madame de la Fayette during her stay in Auvergne, it is easy to realize that the happiness of which she writes was of a somewhat frigid nature. It is also difficult not to suspect that it was a sense of duty, rather than enthusiasm, which turned her thoughts towards a husband who did not possess a single similar taste, and could take no part in her intellectual pleasures. And, in fact, it can even be divined that a day would come when a woman such as she was, so much younger and more cultured than her husband, would feel a need for happiness of a warmer kind, for the possession of a heart more in harmony than his was, and for a life more in unison with her own ideas.

That was the propelling force, coupled with *cacoëthes scribendi*, that induced Madame de la Fayette to go to Paris, while Monsieur de la Fayette decided to remain in Auvergne. Whereupon Madame de la Fayette entered into the intellectual life of Paris, which meant so much to her, and surrounded herself with devoted friends. In her "snuggery" she lived among kindred spirits, both in respect to intellect and affection. It was the period when Boileau declared that "Madame de la Fayette was the most intelligent woman in France", and when the Marquise de Sévigné, who had become so intimate with Marie-Magdeleine since her husband's uncle had married Madame de la Vergne, was complaining that Madame de la Fayette did not love her so much as she herself loved Madame de la Fayette. To these lamentations Madame de la Fayette replied: "Rest assured, my own, that I shall maintain to my dying day, with all the eloquence at my command, that I love you even more than you love me". Madame de la Fayette was also very intimate with a royal Princess—Henriette d'Angleterre, Duchesse d'Orléans, whose acquaintance she had made at the convent of Chaillot; for the Mother Angélique, at one time Louise de la Fayette, who was Abbess of that convent, was her husband's sister. She was also the intimate confidant of the Duchess of Savoy. She was a *persona grata* at the Court, but her natural reserve

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prevented her from attending often. At the Hôtel de Rambouillet she was one of the most appreciated visitors ; and many who frequented the place used to regret that she was not its actual mistress. La Fontaine, Ménage, Huet, and Segrain vied with one another in her praise ; and in 1660 her romance *La Princesse de Montpensier* appeared anonymously ; while a few years later Segrain had to write his own name on *Laire*, because her modesty again prompted her to publish her second book without disclosing its true authorship.

Throughout all these events the name of Monsieur de la Fayette is never mentioned. His non-existence, so far as his wife's life is concerned, is so absolute that posterity has always imagined him at this period to have been probably dead. In many biographies of Madame de la Fayette, in fact, it is definitely stated that she was widowed after three years of married life. However, in a very interesting book that appeared in 1881, Monsieur le Comte d'Haussonville conclusively demonstrated that Monsieur de la Fayette did not die till the 26th of June, 1683, or, in other words, twenty-eight years after he married. But, preserving in his death the same reserve as he had done in his lifetime, Monsieur de la Fayette departed into the Beyond, without leaving behind him any information as to his departure. Even his death-certificate does not state the name of the place where he died.

Although Monsieur de la Fayette did not die till 1683, it appears that in 1659 a new emotion entered into the existence of Madame de la Fayette which in course of time was to dominate her. This emotion was her ardent friendship for La Rochefoucauld—and the exact nature of such friendship is the debatable point in her life. They were first attracted to one another by natural affinity of mind ; but later on, their two lives became blended in a powerful affection, bordering on love. Monsieur d'Haussonville has reason for stating that, at one period of her life, the state of her affections developed in Madame de la Fayette something approaching to genius. In fact, the best of her romances, *La Princesse de Clèves*, which appeared in 1678 and is the earliest psychological novel in the French language, is merely an embroidered version of the story of her own passion for La Rochefoucauld. To study the one is to study the other.

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The Princesse de Clèves bears a remarkable resemblance to Madame de la Fayette—the Duc de Nemours has many features in common with the Duc de la Rochefoucauld; and the Prince de Clèves, who in his gentle retiring way would rather die than reproach his wife for the passion she has conceived for the Duc de Nemours, is strongly reminiscent of the Comte de la Fayette, who concealed himself so successfully in Auvergne that everyone believed him to be dead twenty years before he actually died.

When La Rochefoucauld entered Madame de la Fayette's life, he was approaching his fiftieth year, and she was well on in the thirties. Like the Duc de Nemours, Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld had had *beaucoup de succès*, before meeting Madame de la Fayette. He had been loved by the beautiful heroine of the Fronde, Madame de Longueville. It was always said, and not without reason, that the Comte de Saint-Paul was the son of La Rochefoucauld and Madame de Longueville, and that that lady was still lamenting, behind the grating of the Carmel, La Rochefoucauld's love.

Physically, La Rochefoucauld was still very handsome. He had dark eyes, with well-marked eyebrows, a lithe and perfectly proportioned figure, beautifully regular white teeth, and a charming head of thick, curly, dark hair. Morally, the man who engaged in this friendship with Madame de la Fayette was worn and embittered to the heart's core—pessimistically sick of all the disloyalties, frauds, and rascalities with which he had come into contact. He was, in short, the author of the *Premières Maximes*, who had written with an absolute conviction as to its truth: "All virtues run to egoism, as all rivers run to the sea". In his association with Madame de la Fayette he was not seeking passionate bliss, but merely comfort and consolation. Jean Moréas rightly says: "What sweet tranquillity pervades the passion of the Princesse de Clèves, and the friendship of Madame de la Fayette with La Rochefoucauld!"

However, this so-called friendship obviously was not of the same nature as that which is generally implied by the term. Madame de la Fayette has herself said: "Few women take much interest in the insipidities of friendship, after they have once known love". She would scarcely have spoken in this

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fashion had not she herself known love—and it is difficult to believe that she found it in her marriage. No! the romance of Madame de la Fayette is to be found in her friendship with La Rochefoucauld, in the same way as that of the Princesse de Clèves is to be found in her friendship with the Duc de Nemours. But, despite the restless and irritable temperament of her hero, Madame de la Fayette, with her good sense and keen prevision as to coming storms, was able successfully to steer this romance of her middle age clear of all disturbances and dangers. Their *liaison* lasted for twenty years, and may be regarded as an ethical union, in which La Rochefoucauld gradually became the possessor of Madame de la Fayette's mind and soul, while she extracted out of their exalted friendship all the delights and ecstasies of love. Madame de Scudéry, questioned by the mischievous Bussy as to the relations of La Rochefoucauld and Madame de la Fayette, replied with obvious sincerity: "Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld has dealt most honourably with Madame de la Fayette. There is nothing in it but friendship. The fear of God, and perhaps a regard for their own reputations, have been quite sufficient to clip the wings of love". It is then easy to follow Madame de la Fayette when she writes: "Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld has reshaped my mind; but I have reformed his heart". Such was their influence on one another; and it was so all-sufficing that when, after many years of acute suffering from gout, Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld, despite the continuous and devoted cares of Madame de la Fayette, succumbed to his malady in 1680, she herself remained overwhelmed with grief. From that moment her life was broken. Withdrawing from the social world, she spent three-quarters of her days in bed, and on sunny days, she would sit and dream in her garden for hours, gazing absently into the gradual darkening of the falling night.

Madame de Sévigné, who understood her friend intimately, said: "Time, which is so kind to others, will only increase her sadness". And she was right. Madame de la Fayette survived the man she mourned by thirteen years, but was never again the woman she had been. Listless and sad, she gradually lost all interest in her work and friends, and devoted herself solely to the memory of the dear departed. Religion

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alone, to which, under the direction of the austere Duguet, she devoted herself with an ardour such as she had never known till then, brought her a certain consolation. And when she died on the night of the 25th May, 1693, her friends experienced an actual relief, feeling that her soul had gone forth to meet the one to whom she had been so deeply devoted. The reputation that she left behind her was that of an incomparable friend and of a woman of great intelligence and talent; and posterity has endorsed this opinion in its appreciation of her contributions to literature, and in regarding *La Princesse de Clèves* as a work approximating to genius.



## MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ

[1626-1696]

Madame de Sévigné was one of the most charming women of the seventeenth century. Without claiming for her a breadth of view or power of discernment in advance of her generation, or without desiring to suggest that she was a writer of any depth or special originality, it is none the less true that she has an irresistible attraction to us through both her letters and her friends. Such charm may be traced to the fact that, whether she be engaged in friendly intercourse or in writing her letters, she is always herself. Her life, natural disposition, intelligence, kindness of heart, and spontaneity of manner, all captivate us. Whatsoever differences may exist between us, when once she has caught our attention, she never relaxes her grip; and the desire to escape from a woman of such charm, variety, absorbing interest, vitality, and sympathy, one, in fact, who can vibrate to every emotion, necessarily cannot be said to exist.

Marie de Rabutin Chantal, the future Marquise de Sévigné, was born in Paris on the 5th of February, 1626. She came from a wealthy and important Burgundian family. Left an orphan when six years old, she was brought up by her maternal uncle, the Abbé de Coulanges, whom she delighted to call "*Bien Bon*"—a nickname probably of her own invention. He was, as a matter of fact, absolutely devoted to his charge, and she responded to all his kindness by loving him dearly. The Abbé de Coulanges gave Marie de Chantal an ideally comprehensive and liberal education. She had the most distinguished tutors of her time—Chapelain and Ménage; and she learned Latin, Spanish, and Italian, and was thoroughly grounded in all French literature of possible interest. She was also instructed in music, and, throughout, was especially encouraged to think for herself, to criticize, and to have opinions of her own. In short, her education was calculated



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to make her a woman both of intelligence and of sensibility, and had, whatever may have been said on the matter, the greatest influence in developing her personality, with its ancillary predispositions. At the age of eighteen Marie de Chantal, with her exceptional talents and absorption of the intelligent and broad-minded views of "*Bien Bon*", bore little resemblance to any of her friends. She freely expressed her opinion on all subjects, and relied on herself to form her own conclusions. It was, however, a period in which a young girl was not supposed to think differently from her parents, or rather was not supposed to think at all. A well-brought-up daughter was expected to have everything decided for her by her guardians, to accept the husband of their choice, or even the religious vocation, when they assured her that Heaven had endowed her with one. Those who acted otherwise did not belong to society ; or, if they did, were speedily condemned by it. But Marie de Chantal held reasoned and settled opinions, even on the subject of marriage. She declared that neither wealth nor position, but love, should be its foundation—and her attitude, generally, was so different from that of the young girls of her own class that it made people somewhat afraid of her. Her cousin Bussy Rabutin, whose father would have liked to have seen him marry Mademoiselle de Chantal, said of her : " She is the prettiest girl in the world for someone else to marry "—and many held the same opinion as Bussy, who was not a person to be frightened at nothing. Nevertheless, since Mademoiselle de Chantal had a dowry of a hundred-thousand crowns, she had the choice among a large number of suitors ; and she selected the Marquis de Sévigné, who came from a very old Breton family. The Sévignés were related to Cardinal de Retz, and were regarded as being extremely well off. The Marquis was good-looking, honest, and fearless—but unfortunately incurably frivolous. The young girl was quite aware of this last failing, but she hoped that her sturdy affection for him would have the effect of making her husband steady and faithful.

"The marriage, then, took place at the beginning of 1644 ; and on the following day, the young Marquis, who for the moment was very much in love with his charming wife, took her into Brittany to his estate of Les Rochers, where for



MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ



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several months Madame de Sévigné made acquaintance with the joys of love and the gallant attentions of her clever and well-bred husband. But the year had not come to an end before the Marquis had grown tired of a happiness so devoid of risk and excitement. He endeavoured to persuade his wife that they ought to return to Paris, and the Marquise consented, though with much regret. Their return was welcomed with enthusiasm by their numerous friends.

"Hail to you both!—as we chant you a litany,  
You, who've been lost in the wilds of far Brittany,  
Attached to your house and your farm and such fudge,  
Fatuous creatures, we owe you a grudge.  
Hail to you both!—but we don't really mean it.  
—Your conduct is such that nothing can screen it."<sup>1</sup>

But, despite their welcome, her return was to bring Madame de Sévigné nothing but bitterness and disappointment. Directly they were settled in Paris, the Marquis retook to his life of dissipation and frivolous amours. The young wife, neglected as she was before she reached her nineteenth year, then entered upon that period of broken hope and constant disappointment which was to continue during six years of the seven which made up her married life.

However, nothing could prevent Madame de Sévigné from being one of the most attractive women of the day. Every friend of the Marquis told him that. Many of them would gladly have assisted the young woman in retaliating against a husband, who was so unappreciative as to ignore the value of the gift Fate had bestowed on him—for no one could be in the society of the Marquise without experiencing the power of her fascination. Was she actually pretty? She certainly had superb fair hair, "thick and of fine texture", an admirable complexion, and a sunny smile. But her face was too broad, her eyes though very bright were too small and of different colours, her nose was too square, and her eyelashes were of varying tints. And yet the very first glance of Madame de Sévigné had an irresistible attraction, her conversation

<sup>1</sup> " *Salut à vous, gens de campagne,  
A vous, immeubles de Bretagne,  
Attachés à votre maison  
Au-delà de toute raison !  
Salut à tous deux, quoique indignes  
De nos saluts et de ces lignes !*"

## MADAME DE SEVIGNE

charmed and captivated everyone who heard it, and, practically, only to see her meant to admire and like her. Bussy Rabutin had good reason for saying to the Marquis de Sévigné: "If my cousin had not been your wife, you would have done your best to make her your mistress".

Madame de la Fayette, following the fashion of the *Précieuses* in making delicately accurate little pen-portraits of one another, wrote to Madame de Sévigné: "When people are listening to you, they forget altogether that your features are not strictly regular, and credit you with the greatest beauty in the world". Madame de la Fayette was absolutely right—the fascination which Madame de Sévigné so generally exercised lay in the words she either spoke or wrote; though her personality also had its fascination, and Bussy Rabutin was equally correct with Madame de la Fayette, when he said: "The Marquis de Sévigné has loved all sorts in all places, but he never loved anything so lovable as his wife".

Bussy Rabutin was so convinced as to the bad taste of the Marquis in not appreciating his wife that he decided to take advantage of his close friendship with his cousin to make her fall in love with him. To effect his end, he did not even shrink from betraying the confidences of Monsieur de Sévigné, who had confided to him that he was on the best of terms with Ninon de Lenclos. So he hastened off to impart the news to his cousin, hoping thereby to set her against the Marquis. But Madame de Sévigné evinced neither anger nor bitterness when she heard his unpleasant statement; and Bussy was unable to discover what she really did think of her husband. The Marquise only expressed her opinion on it to her husband himself, and then in so playful a manner that anyone else would have at once abandoned the intrigue with Ninon, if only to be nice to his wife. But the Marquis did nothing of the sort. On the contrary, following up his good luck, the next day he made preparations to spend the following day and night at Versailles with the bewitching Ninon. But he could not resist the satisfaction of informing Bussy of the matter, having previously admonished him for his indiscretion of the evening before. Bussy did not repeat it; but, profiting by the Marquis' absence, he wrote his cousin a letter of passionate

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avowal. This letter was taken by the messenger, who had no knowledge of its contents, to Monsieur de Sévigné, who had returned somewhat sheepishly to his own house, owing to the fair Ninon having decided not to go to Versailles. The only one who suffered through this mishap was Bussy Rabutin. Whatsoever might have been his opinion on the matter, the result to him would have been exactly the same, had his cousin received the letter. Never did Madame de Sévigné respond to overtures of that kind, either in her husband's life-time or throughout her long widowhood. It may be that her heart was temperamentally more inclined to friendship than to love; or, like her grandmother Saint Jeanne de Chantal, that she had difficulty in resisting the temptations of the spirit, but none whatever those of the flesh; but, whatever may have been the true reason, the fact is certain that she never betrayed a trace of weakness, in that respect, throughout her life. Not even at the height of her husband's infidelities did Madame de Sévigné ever dream of paying him back in his own coin.

He, however, continued to lead his life of dissipation, with valour and love so inextricably mixed that he was ready at a moment's notice to defend his lady's honour at the point of the sword. And it was thus that he died, in a duel with the Chevalier d'Albret, fighting for the love of Madame de Gondran, known under the popular nickname of "La Belle Lolo". At the time of his death Henri de Sévigné was only thirty, and his widow twenty-five. He left two children—Charles de Sévigné, born in 1647, and Françoise de Sévigné, the future Madame de Grignan, born in 1648. The young widow's resources and those of her two children had been greatly involved by the Marquis' extravagances. Not only had the Marquis de Sévigné increased the mortgages on his properties—for such had existed at the time of his marriage, though it had not been declared—but he had considerably encroached on his wife's private means.

Madame de Sévigné befittingly mourned a husband whom, as she said, she had loved without being able to give him her esteem, whilst he, on the contrary, had esteemed her, without being able to give her his love. But she did not mourn unnecessarily a man who had proved such a disappoint-

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ment to her, and had caused her so much suffering. And, as a matter of fact, it was only after the period of mourning had been completed that the true life of this delightful woman really began. Liberated from the distress of an unhappy marriage, she was now in a position to give free play to the various qualities of her nature—to her infectious gaiety and cheerful outlook, which she owed mainly to her perfect health—to her good sense, which never failed her, and was a characteristic of her race—to her steadfast constancy towards all her friends—to her exceptional aptitude for interesting herself in all things and in all sorts and conditions of men—to her vitality, which gave life to everything she touched—and to her picturesque and comprehending mind, protean in character and possessing the assured stamp of an individuality that was unique.

It was only after her husband's death that her numerous friends were enabled to appreciate her at her true worth, and her children to obtain full possession of her. Almost all her friends adored her ; and of her children the one who loved her the most was the one she cared about the least—her son Charles. The one hope of the young men who made up the inner circle of the Marquise's friends—the Contis, Rohans, Fouquets, Retzs, de Ludes, de Turennes, and, of course, Bussy, whose past experiences had in no way affected his love-ambitions in respect to his cousin—their one hope was to gain Madame de Sévigné's love now that she was free. The sweet Marquise listened to them all with gentle kindness ; and, as it were in charity, gave them her hand to kiss—but despite her frankness of speech, captivating powers of conversation, playfulness, gaiety, and amazing vitality, she contrived to retain all of them within the confines of a most ideal friendship. Bussy had been especially desirous of converting his past defeats into victory ; and he had also made an appeal to his cousin's purse, at a moment when a loan had become impossible, both owing to the consequences of the late Marquis' extravagances and to the fact that Bussy was not the sort of debtor that anyone would clamour to possess. So, in both instances, Madame de Sévigné had to refuse—and this so exasperated Bussy that he included a long and bitter description of her in his lying and scan-

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dalous *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*. This portrait by Bussy of Madame de Sévigné caused her great pain—and it made such a noise in the world, and had such an influence on all that was said and thought about her, that it cannot be passed over in silence. However, it is only necessary to deal with the moral aspect of this presentment, though we do not intend to imply that Madame de Sévigné was indifferent to matters pertaining to her physical appearance. That was certainly not the case, for several years after the marriage of her daughter she devoted a whole letter to Madame de Grignan in complaining of one of her portraits which had just been painted: "I do wish that my portrait had been a little less uncouth; I cannot imagine anyone looking at it with pleasure or tenderness". Neither do we mean to suggest that Bussy did not turn his unpleasant and malicious mind to the distortion of his cousin's prettiest features. We merely mean that, whereas we of this generation are not in a position to meet Madame de Sévigné except through her Letters, naturally our chief interest in her is centred in the expression of her thoughts and feelings.

Bussy begins by referring to Madame de Sévigné's intelligence in an appreciative manner, such as he calculated would gain for him the confidence of his readers. "No woman exists with greater intelligence than hers, and but few have as much. She is most amusing". So far, so good—he merely speaks the truth. But Bussy Rabutin quickly descends to calumny: "Some people are inclined to think that perhaps, for a woman of quality, her attitude is a trifle too jocose . . . She divines what is passing in your mind, and then usually leads you on much further than you ever intended to go. Sometimes, on the other hand, when one deliberately leads her a dance, she is so carried away by the excitement of the joke that she greedily listens to anything that you may say, no matter how broad it may be, provided it be sufficiently veiled—and she answers you back in the same vein, and, to prevent your getting the better of her, does not hesitate to follow you up with something stronger still". In such manner does Bussy distort one of Madame de Sévigné's greatest charms, her sense of humour, into something approaching a vice. He transforms the Marquise's frank and



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wholesome sense of humour—the certain sign of a pure mind with a strong and clean imagination, that sees things as they are, and calls them by their proper names—into a ribald form of badinage such as desires merely to arouse, both in oneself and others, sensations of a vile and vulgar kind. It will be perceived that this description is quite incompatible with the known sound judgment of Madame de Sévigné—the quality which was so especially admired by all her friends. No—this cormorant who “greedily listens to anything that you may say, no matter how broad it may be”, cannot be that same wise and prudent woman who has understood how to convert all her would-be lovers into devoted friends, who has been able to bring even a Fouquet to his senses, who, with the aid of “*Bien Bon*”, has restored her fallen fortunes, and who, in a century where intrigues ran rampant throughout the Court and Town, had never been mixed up in a single one. From moral defects Bussy proceeds to those of judgment: “In a woman of such brilliancy it is not strange to find a lack of discernment”. The injustice of this remark becomes all the more *piquante* when we recall that Bussy Rabutin was practically devoid of this particular quality which he denies to his cousin, while Madame de Sévigné gives evidence of an astonishing clear-sightedness in her judgment on most of the people and events of her time. Who, one may ask, almost on the morrow of Turenne’s death, the 13th of July, 1675, could have framed a more appropriate appreciation of his loss, in such a few words: “The King’s grief was such as was only to be expected on the death of the greatest soldier and best fellow in the world”? What better comment could there have been on Madame de Brinvilliers’ death than that which Madame de Sévigné made in a single word: “La Brinvilliers has died, as she lived—resolutely”? On the day after La Rochefoucauld’s death no one perceived with such certainty that Madame de la Fayette would never find solace in her grief. “Time will be powerless to alleviate Madame de la Fayette’s sorrow in her bereavement. Her life is now so shaped that it will henceforth be her daily companion”. Such quotations could be multiplied *ad libitum*, in proof of Bussy Rabutin’s mendacity.

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Undoubtedly the objection might be advanced that Madame de Sévigné has often arrived at conclusions such as the present day is inclined to criticize, and acquiesced in sentiments with which it is out of sympathy. She treated it as a joke when numbers of Bretons were hanged and ill-treated on the mere suspicion of a rising. She could not conceal her delight when Mademoiselle de Grignan, in obedience to the behest of her father and step-mother—who had incidentally benefited by her money—was about to enter the cloister. Vatel's death was dismissed with a mere reference to the scent of the jonquils; and, in the "*Affaire des Poisons*", her only expression of regret has been in respect to the fact that so many implicated belonged to the best families of France. She idolized Louis XIV, as did all her contemporaries, but she unfortunately gave vent to her opinion as to his greatness immediately after the King had paid her a very particular attention.

But such conclusions and expressions of opinion in no way detract from her power of discernment. The explanation of her attitude towards the Bretons and Vatel is to be found in her education, and in the times in which she lived—the "*Affaire des Poisons*" in the fascination which the great nobility of France had for a woman whose own status was nearer to the bourgeoisie than to the higher peerage, and whose ardent imagination was stimulated and excited by the thought of the deeds of those who had made France, and of those who were still adding glory to it by their renown. Maternal love, which with Madame de Sévigné was a blind and all-embracing passion, was alone responsible for the joy she experienced at knowing that Mademoiselle de Grignan, her daughter's step-daughter, had decided to take the veil. And if she associated the greatness of Louis XIV with the attentions which he had shown her, she did so just because she was a woman, in whom coquetry never really dies. Madame de Sévigné, despite her cleverness and pronounced good-sense, had retained her little vanities and her tendency to coquet. As a matter of fact, had she not possessed such little weaknesses, which created in her a desire to please, she would not have been so lovable or so loved.

Everything in this picture of Madame de Sévigné by Bussy

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Rabutin is the result of sheer malice conjoined to accurate observation ; for, with his customary astuteness, he has not attributed to her anything absolutely foreign to her nature, but merely deftly distorted the characteristics she was known to possess. It is impossible to quote this crafty description in full, but the points which gave the Marquise the most pain ought not to be omitted. " Her temperament is cold—at least, if we are to believe her late husband on the point, who used to say that all her ardour was in her head. However, to speak quite frankly, I do believe, as men view these things, that he most successfully got out of the difficulty, but I consider her to have been unfaithful to him in the eyes of God. She has made friends with four or five prudes, with whom she goes all over the place, apparently under the impression that blameless company will afford the necessary cloak to anything she does . . . This fair creature's friendship does not extend to her purse . . . Her one endeavour is to pretend that she is something she isn't . . . Her eyes are of a different colour, and, the eyes being a mirror to the soul, such an anomaly should be regarded as a direct warning by nature to all who come into contact with her, that it is not safe to rely too confidently on her friendship ". It is obvious that the painful attacks and unjust insinuations to be found in these quotations were inspired solely by the personal rancour of Bussy Rabutin. The number of friends that Madame de Sévigné possessed, and the quantity of letters she received and wrote, prove conclusively how mendacious was the statement that it was not safe to rely too confidently on her friendship. Possibly he was nearer the truth when he said that the Marquis de Sévigné had complained that all the ardour of his wife was in her head ; but, as to the " prude " manoeuvre which he attributes to her, he has evidently been unable to distinguish between prudence and prudery. And, with regard to the imputation of meanness, Bussy, who had several times before her final refusal dipped his hands into his cousin's pocket, was well aware that her caution in the matter was solely dictated by her solicitude for her children's welfare. Finally, Sainte-Beuve has written, as follows : " This portrait is the masterpiece of a spiteful and caustic artist, who gives to each feature he

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desires to disparage a particular touch, such as traduces the whole, and disfigures it”.

If we glance through Madame de Sévigné's Letters, we certainly find no woman of the character depicted in this malicious portrait. But what we do find in them is the true Madame de Sévigné; for, in contradistinction to *Memoirs* and *Confessions*, the Marquise's letters have been written solely for those to whom they were addressed. Doubtless Madame de Sévigné was fully aware that her letters were considered so attractive that they were being passed round among her friends. That is why she sometimes pauses to touch them up—to search for every adjective in the vocabulary to meet the case of La Grande Mademoiselle's marriage, or for the graceful phrases with which to depict her hay making scene. But, after all, these are only exceptions, and even in such exceptions Madame de Sévigné does it solely with the intention of interesting her own friends. Her letters, therefore, are the expression of her ordinary self, and she is assuming no airs and graces for the edification of a vast public or for posterity. She has no thought for either one or the other. It is in her letters to her daughter that she reveals most clearly her tenderest feelings, while those to Bussy—written previous to their quarrel, and after their reconciliation—disclose her as a bright and witty woman of the world. In her correspondence with Monsieur de Grignan she confines herself to matters of criticism and appreciation. But no matter to whom she writes or what may be the occasion she is always vivacious and in a ferment of excitement, bringing life to everything she touches. Her vitality is such that it positively overflows into places where it has no existence. Is not this the explanation of her enthusiasm for the *Essais de Morale* by Nicole? Imagining that she is reading them as they are written, in reality she is, all the time, attributing to the “beautiful words” of Nicole the fairy-like wonder of her own style and the intimate conceptions of her own amazing individuality. In the same way, she invests the later writings of the decrepit Corneille with her own youth and vigour, and for that reason continues to prefer him to Racine until the moment of his death—and she even detects in Boileau something of her own high spirits.

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The letters to Madame de Grignan are by far the most numerous in Madame de Sévigné's vast correspondence. They are also the most impassioned. Mathieu Marais has said in reference to them: "There is more love to be found in these letters than has been uttered by all the lovers of the world since the beginning of time". And Arnaud d'Andilly, with his Jansenistic severity, said to the adoring mother: "You are just a little pagan, setting up your daughter as an image". It may even be advanced that it was this imperious, all-absorbing, tyrannical love of Madame de Sévigné for her daughter that gave to her her great originality, and assisted in the furtherance of her genius. Without it, she would never have known deep and acute suffering, and her most tender and intimate touches of self-revelation would have been lost—for they had their origin in Mademoiselle de Sévigné's insensibility. Several people, Joseph de Maistre among them, have maintained that the characteristic indifference of her daughter's attitude was actually due to the hunger and exuberance of her own love. It appeared to them that a well-balanced nature might easily become fatigued and worn-out by such an excess of demonstration. Such reasoning might be accepted, had Mademoiselle—who, previous to her marriage, was called "the prettiest girl in France"—ever displayed tenderness towards anyone belonging to her. But, as a matter of fact, Mademoiselle de Sévigné, who became Comtesse de Grignan on the 29th of February, 1669, after Louis XIV had for a short time paid her somewhat marked attention, never evinced any emotion save in respect to her own sufferings and her personal discomfitures. A mistake which she made as a young girl at the card-table at the Court, so humiliated her, that she never wished to return to it again. On the other hand, she cheerfully submitted to long separations from her husband, whom, however, she called her "*très cher comte*", and to whom she sent kisses by letter with "*tout son cœur*". She displayed particular harshness to her elder daughter Marie-Blanche, by shutting her up in the Convent de la Visitation d'Aix at the age of five and a half. The poor child was destined never to leave it. At sixteen she had taken her final vows, and she died in the same convent at

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the age of sixty-five. Madame de Grignan showed no more tenderness to her daughter Pauline, and her own mother had to write to her imploringly: "Love Pauline—do love her!" And Pauline most assuredly would have been shut up in the convent like her sister Marie-Blanche, had it not been for the intervention of her warm-hearted grandmother, and the love of Monsieur de Simiane. Even her son, of whom she was so proud, the Marquis de Grignan, had no power to arouse tenderness in his mother's heart. When he married the daughter of a rich financier, bringing him a dowry of four-hundred-thousand *livres*, which were sadly needed by the Grignan family, Madame de Grignan was cruel enough on leaving to say: "After all, the very best land has to be manured from time to time". No—it was not her mother's love that made that woman an egoist. No one would have had the power to make her tender and sympathetic. Nature herself, when making her beautiful, forgot to provide her with a heart.

But Madame de Sévigné saw no faults in her daughter—she adored her beauty, carriage, intelligence, wit, good-taste, talents, opinions, in fact all the qualities with which she was pleased to invest her. Nothing delighted her more than to listen to compliments regarding her daughter—it almost reduced her to tears. So her sorrow can be imagined, when, at the beginning of 1671, Monsieur de Grignan, Lieutenant Général of Provence, took his wife away with him to that distant province where he was obliged to go, and take up his residence: "I betook myself to Sainte-Marie, almost dying of grief. I felt that my heart and soul had been torn out of me". Thenceforth there were only two dates in the calendar that really interested Madame de Sévigné—the day on which she would next meet her daughter, and the day which would bring about their next parting. No matter whether her son set out for the army to fight the Turks in Flanders or on the Rhine, or later on whether he had "*aventures bizarres*" with Ninon de Lenclos, La Champmeslé, or with women in high society, in the eyes of Madame de Sévigné the really important events were those which concerned her daughter. In fact, in respect to her everything assumed importance. "The north wind of Grignan makes

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me cold, as I think of your chest ", she wrote, with a shiver—and " Ever I follow you into your charming bed-room at Grignan ; and am wholly yours ".

Madame de Sévigné's letters to her daughter run through the whole gamut or agitation, fear, storm, and torture, such as is generally associated with love in the ordinary sense of the word. " Did I but have a heart of crystal ", she writes to her, on the 10th of January, 1680, " in which you could perceive the profound sadness which overcame me when I knew that you were hoping that I might live to survive you, you would realize most clearly how truly and warmly I, on my side, desire that Providence should not see fit to alter the ordinary course of nature ". On another day she is apprehensive of giving her too much trouble in asking her for a letter : " I don't expect a whole sheet, but merely a page, just a line—nothing, in fact, that will put you to any inconvenience ". To all this ardour, solicitude, and tenderness, Madame de Grignan, as often as not, replies in terms of careless affection. Sometimes even her attitude betrays such indifference that Madame de Sévigné implores her at least to accept her love. It was this painful abnegation on her part which touched Jules Lemaître, when he wrote of Madame de Sévigné : " I have the liveliest affection for this Mother of Joy, who, I am afraid was often a Mother of Sorrow, though she attempted to conceal it ".

In her letters to Bussy Rabutin, Madame de Sévigné displays her learning, while, at the same time, surpassing herself in wit and humour. It is easy to deduce that, having a wholesome dread of the man's spite and bitter wit, she desires to stand well with him : " I have always had confidence in your happy temperament, dear cousin, and though I know several who would have probably hanged themselves in the predicament you were in, when you left us, your past gave me, to a certain extent, assurance as to your future ". She admonishes him as to the folly of regarding comets as portents ; and she relates to him in detail how greatly she appreciated the Funeral Oration that Bourdaloue pronounced upon Monsieur le Prince (April, 1687). It is also to him that she confesses her admiration for La Fontaine and Benserade. Probably Bussy felt, as we do, a certain incongruity in such a

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conjunction of names, but the ardour with which she scatters her appreciations arouses enthusiasm, and silences criticism. Her love for the fine trees at Livry, the husbandry at Les Rochers, and the wild landscapes of La Provence are also to be found in her letters to Bussy Rabutin. This love of nature, whatsoever may have been said about it, shows Madame de Sévigné to have been in advance of her times, and in that it suggested qualities of an imaginative and intelligent order found a natural place in her correspondence with her cousin. For, in writing to him, she would carefully select such subjects with the idea of making herself as pleasant as possible.

To appreciate the full charm of her intelligence and the multiple fascination of her style, it would be necessary not only to quote all her letters, but to study what all her correspondents had written to her. At the magic touch of her pen, the most trivial things become vital with interest. She makes use of her mind to describe her tenderest feelings, and with tender feeling discloses the working of her mind. She amuses us by her indignation against Ménage, who makes her feel, she says, as though she had a beard on her chin, when he insists on her saying "*enrhumée, je le suis*", and not "*enrhumée, je la suis*". We are stirred by the animation with which she relates the ups and downs of joy and fear that agitated Fouquet's friends during the prolonged course of his trial, and we shudder at her description of Louvois' death.

This radiant woman of such varied interests, who shed sunshine on every friend and every place in which she lived, and who for seventy years had scarcely known what sickness was, was taken ill when away from her own home, and launched into Eternity so abruptly that those who loved her had barely had time to realize that her condition was most dangerous. It was at her daughter's place at Grignan that the malady, without any premonitory symptoms, laid her low. What exactly the complaint was is not known. Possibly anxiety with regard to her daughter's health and the fatigue of her own journey down to Provence may have been contributory causes. Her son-in-law, Monsieur de Grignan, announced her death to President Mouleau, one of the friends who corresponded with her, in these terms: "From the beginning of her illness she faced death with an astonishing steadfastness



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and resignation. The woman, who had been so tender and yielding towards everyone she loved, displayed only courage and faith when it became a question of having to think of herself ”.

No more beautiful and simple appreciation could have been formulated in respect to this delightful woman, who continues to charm posterity to-day as she charmed her contemporaries in the past. She lies at the entrance of the chancel in the Collegiate Church of Grignan, in a tomb of white marble, on which is written :

“ HERE LIES  
MARIE DE RABUTIN CHANTEL  
MARQUISE DE SÉVIGNÉ  
DIED APRIL 18TH, 1696 ”

## OLYMPE MANCINI

### COMTESSE DE SOISSONS

[1639-1708]

Olympe Mancini arrived at the French Court in 1646, at the age of seven. It was the period when her uncle, Mazarin, was at the height of his power, despite the numerous efforts made by the Frondeurs to effect his downfall; and the little Olympe was, to all intents and purposes, brought up with the young King, who was only two years older than herself.

From the fact that girls are more intuitive than boys, Olympe soon realized the advantages which might accrue to her through her comradeship with Louis XIV. Deftly and artfully she gradually accustomed the King to devote himself to her, to the exclusion of the other little girls of the Royal Household, to choose her for his partner in his games, and even to make to her timid declarations of love. And so well did she play her hand that, by the date of her sixteenth birthday, she had become the idol of the Court. Indeed, matters had progressed so far that it had become just a question of chance as to who was to be the first to give open expression to the secret ambition that was smouldering within her—for even people whose judgment was valued by the Throne itself were wondering whether a marriage between the two might not, after all, be in every way suitable.

However, Louis XIV made no definite advance—and Anne of Austria became furious whenever anyone mentioned so much as the possibility of a marriage between her son and Olympe Mancini—while Mazarin himself discreetly took no part in the intrigue. And Olympe at length awoke to the realization that, despite her sulks and tears, the matter was making no progress at all. Her cousin Martinozzi had but lately married the Prince de Conti, while, as for her—not only had she failed to gain the title of Queen of France, but even

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that of Marquise, which might have been hers had she but married the Marquis de la Meilleraie !

And then Eugène de Carignan came on the scene—Prince of Savoy, through his father, and of France through his Bourbon mother. Did the Prince of Savoy arouse love in Olympe ? It is almost certain that her feelings for him never rose above esteem—but he was doubly a Prince ; and, once the marriage were completed, Mazarin had promised to raise him to the rank of Prince of the Blood under the title of Comte de Soissons. In addition to this, he was as good as he was brave. And it must be remembered that Olympe was not really beautiful, though she had dared to raise her eyes to the crown of France. Her great charm and indisputable fascination were due to her superb and unfailing good health—a physical condition to which she owed the brilliancy of her complexion, the vivacity of her little black eyes, the plumpness of her figure, the softness of her skin, her animated manner, and, in fact, everything that made her so attractive to her numerous admirers. Nor was her mind in any way remarkable. Indeed, after her marriage she was called “the Soissons goose”. But she was well-qualified for intrigue, and quite dexterous in getting out of scrapes. And, in addition to all this, her ardent Italian temperament was alluring and provocative of love. Such being the case, on the day she married the Comte de Soissons—the 24th of February, 1657—Olympe, in all the radiance of her sweet seventeen, created universal admiration. Loret wrote in the *Presse Historique* :

“ And as for his partner, we only can say, (*meaning the Prince de Carignan's bride*)

She looked so enticing, when married to-day,

No wonder that Cupid made use of her eyes

To wound one and all—e'en the gods in the skies”.<sup>1</sup>

Loret, in this last line, was referring to Olympe's supreme distinction—her friendship with the youthful Louis XIV. Olympe's marriage, far from separating her from the King, brought them even closer together. For, from that moment the King, in full assurance that he had nothing further to fear

<sup>1</sup> “ *Et, pour son adorable amante,  
Elle est et paraît si charmante  
Qu'Amour des traits de ses beaux yeux  
A blessé jusques à nos dieux*”.

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from the matrimonial designs of Mademoiselle Mancini, called every day on the Comtesse de Soissons, and remained with her so long as to give rise to the suggestion of an undesirable degree of intimacy. Her husband, as unsuspecting as he was loyal, lavished wealth and devotion in assuring his King a fitting reception. The Hôtel de Soissons, in fact, became a second Court, though in every way brighter and more sumptuous than the real one.

However, the serenity of this pleasant state of intimacy between the Comtesse and the King was not to be of long duration, and it was her own sister, Marie Mancini, who brought it to an end. For she aroused in Louis XIV a warmth of affection that he had never felt for Olympe. Marie—with her superior intelligence and education, strong and dominating will, and temperament so ardent as to inflame all those, whom her unique beauty attracted—had gained an influence over the King such as her sister had never possessed. After making full use of the Hôtel de Soissons to meet Louis XIV and to steal her way into his heart, she left no stone unturned to lure him away from a place where she feared the attractions and long-standing friendship of a rival. And so it came about that the King, gradually yielding to the influence of Marie Mancini, went less and less to the Comtesse de Soissons, until the day finally arrived when his visits ceased altogether. The Count was inconsolable over the King's abstention. He regarded it in the light of a personal humiliation, without a suspicion as to the part his sister-in-law had played in the matter.

However, after Louis XIV's own marriage it was not long before he had severed his connection with Marie Mancini. The ardent Italian, whose dream of becoming Queen of France had thus been shattered, feverishly embarked on flirtations of all sorts with the deliberate intention of paying the King back in his own coin. Louis XIV was not the sort of man to tolerate such an attitude for long; so Marie Mancini was made to pay for her impudence by having to marry the Constable Colonna by proxy, and by joining him at once in Naples.

Marie had scarcely left the Court before Louis XIV was again running round to the Hôtel de Soissons, and making

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fresh protestations to the Countess of his ardent friendship. He went to see her every day, and, just as had happened before, remained with her for hours in succession—and finally, as a mark of the affection he had borne towards her from the days of their childhood, he appointed her Superintendent of the Queen's Household. Such an appointment gave to "Madame la Comtesse"—as she was called, in the same way as the King's brother was addressed simply as "Monsieur", and his sister-in-law as "Madame", a procedure for the purpose of indicating that they were the Monsieur and the Dame, *par excellence*, as was Olympe the Countess, in contradistinction to all others—such an appointment gave her an authority over and above that of all the other ladies of the Court with the sole exception of the Princesses of the Blood Royal. Such Princesses themselves had no voice in the organization of the Queen's Household, or in respect to the entertainments given by Her Majesty—while the Superintendent of the Household, in all such matters, had absolute authority.

The King, who by this time had divested himself of the last shred of that modesty of demeanour which Anne of Austria and Mazarin had imposed on him for so many years, occasionally took the liberty of paying nocturnal calls on certain of the Queen's Maids-of-Honour. Shortly after Madame la Comtesse's appointment, Queen Marie-Thérèse's senior Lady-in-Waiting, Madame de Navailles, discovered that the King effected his entry into the young ladies' quarters by means of their bedroom windows; and accordingly she at once had all such windows walled up. So it happened one evening, when the King went round to one of them, that he found himself facing a solid wall. He was so exasperated that on the next morning he reported the matter to Madame la Comtesse. The Comte de Soissons was so incensed against Madame de Navailles for having dared to usurp his wife's prerogative that he challenged Monsieur de Navailles to a duel. So the two gentlemen crossed swords—and by Madame la Comtesse's orders the offending walls were demolished.

However, neither her powerful position in the Queen's Household, nor the especial regard of the King, nor the honours which had fallen to her lot was sufficient to satisfy the restless brain of the Countess. She could not be happy

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without some intrigue; and to this purpose she organized plots and cabals, in the first place against the Duchesse d'Orléans, and then against the gentle and retiring La Vallière. Her lover for the moment was one de Vardes, a natural intriguer like herself, and equally skilful in devising intricate and underhand plots. He was the son of Henri IV and the Comtesse de Moret, whose birth gave him the *entré* everywhere; and he it was who helped Madame de Soissons to conspire against those two charming women. Magic, sorcery, and witchcraft were all made use of to do them harm. Their machinations, indeed, were so mysterious and complicated that no one has ever been able to follow the ins and outs, or estimate the actual danger of their scheme. But howsoever obscure they may have been, the fact remains that both the Comte and Comtesse de Soissons were exiled into Champagne, although the Countess had never taken her husband into her confidence in respect to her weird practices (1665). The rôle of the Count throughout had been confined to seeking out de Vardes, and making all kinds of advances to him, when he imagined that the latter had quarrelled with his wife. The poor Count loved Olympe so much that he could not bear to see her suffer. And it was this strong love he had for her that prevented him from detecting in her either frailty or fault, and caused him placidly to accept his exile into Champagne—for he knew that he would have there a possession of inestimable price, his beloved Countess.

This exile was to produce definite consequences in Olympe's life. Never again was the Comtesse de Soissons to regain the place at Court which she had had to vacate when leaving for Champagne; nor would she ever reassume her former influence over the heart and mind of the King; though, of course, she returned to her superb house in Paris, where receptions and play began again with the same brilliance and animation as of old. However, to the ordinary diversions of the mistress of the house, with all its luxurious accompaniments, there had been now added a new distraction, of a much more disturbing order than any of its former amusements—namely the study and practice of magic, with all its feverish and agitating emotions. There was a craze for astrology, and the drawing of horoscopes, and attempts to

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communicate with the spirits of the dead. The Countess and her admirers appear to have been singularly skilful in evoking confidences from the latter. But the former supremacy of the Superintendent of the Household had vanished for ever. Her sway was now confined to the precincts of the Hôtel de Soissons. The first of the Mancinis, who had hoped to become Queen of France, had ceased to have any influence whatever at the Court.

Olympe was beginning to forget her past greatness in her passion for the Duc de Villeroy and her enthusiasm for the occult arts, when she heard in May, 1673, that her husband had fallen ill in Champagne. It was not imagined that there was much the matter with him, and Olympe wondered whether her husband's condition was sufficiently serious to necessitate her leaving Paris with its friends and amusements, and to undertake so difficult and wearisome a journey. Was the Count's condition of such a nature as to need the services of his wife? Madame de Soisson's friends gave due deliberation to the subject, and finally decided to resort to magic to ascertain the truth. On the evening appointed, the Countess, her sister, the Duchesse de Bouillon, Monsieur de Vendôme, the Duc de Villeroy, and a number of her less intimate friends assembled together, and an old gentleman of the party was desired to get into communication with the spirit-world. The Abbé de Choisy, who was one of the Countess' guests on that particular evening, relates in his *Memoirs* the procedure employed by the old gentleman in question. A little girl of five years old, who knew nothing as to what was going to be done, was shut up in a dark cabinet, with instructions that she was to call out loudly whatsoever she might see; and, before closing the door a glass of water was put on the small table in the centre of the cabinet: the gentleman, placing the child's hand on the top of it, explained to her that she was to keep it there with her eyes fixed on the glass, as it would be in the glass that she would see something. Then the gentleman in question, returning to the middle of the drawing-room, explained to all present that the little girl would see in the glass either a tiger or a white horse. If she saw a tiger, it would be a matter for rejoicing—for it would indicate with certainty that either the Count's illness was not serious or that,

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in any case, he would get well. If, however, the child were to see a white horse, it would signify that the Count's condition was desperate. Not only would he die of his malady, but would die so quickly that the Countess would not have time to reach him before the end. Twice the gentleman made his occult passes, and twice the little girl called out that she saw a white horse. According to the Abbé de Choisy, so conclusive a proof left no doubt in the mind of anyone present, and a great sadness settled on the room. Olympe, now fully persuaded that she would arrive too late in Champagne to be of help and comfort to her husband, decided not to face the difficulties of a pointless journey, and did not stir from Paris. At the same time, the Count lay dying in Champagne, and he expired, separated from wife and all he loved, on the 7th of June, 1673. Olympe, at the time, was thirty-three, and had given eight children to her husband.

This sudden death of the Comte de Soissons, combined with the circumstances of his last hours and the calm way in which the Countess had awaited the development of events in Paris, made a painful impression on those who were not in her immediate circle. Scarcely four years had elapsed since Paris had been so greatly moved by the La Brinvilliers trial. The affair at the time had created such a profound sensation, and had left so permanent a mark that many people now found themselves inclined to wonder whether certain points of resemblance did not exist between the circumstances of the present case and those of the notorious poisoner. Like La Brinvilliers, Madame de Soissons had had passionate love-affairs during her married life ; and, in addition to this, there was the disquieting if not alarming dabbling in the occult to which she was addicted. The suspicion was so definite and general that finally a belief gained ground—though no one dared openly express it—that the Countess had had something to do with her husband's death ; and it was just at this moment that what was called "*L'Affaire des Poisons*"<sup>1</sup> startled the public conscience.

For several years past Paris had been the prey of *soi-disant*, sorcerers, sorceresses, and dealers in poison. The confessions

<sup>1</sup> For fuller details on this point see *Drames Mystérieux—La Voisin and her Associates*.



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to the priests at Notre-Dame were nothing but avowals of poisoning ; at the Jésuites a letter was picked up in a confessional denouncing a plot for the poisoning of Louis XIV and the Dauphin ; and at a dinner, where the bar was represented, the widow of a wine-merchant, who had indulged too freely in burgundy, called out : " Three more poisonings, and my fortune is made ". All such facts coming to the knowledge of the police led to the institution of inquiries, which revealed such a number of monstrous crimes that Louis XIV resolved to take prompt and vigorous action. He decided to convene at once an extraordinary Commission, composed of the most upright and experienced members of the magistracy, to try with the least possible delay such crimes as sorcery and poisoning.

The President of this Commission was La Reynie ; the place selected for its sessions the Arsenal ; and the name given to it the *Chambre Ardente*. At the beginning of 1679, the *Chambre Ardente* issued an order for the arrest of the most notorious sorceress of the time, the woman La Voisin. In her first examinations, La Voisin brought accusations against the Comtesse de Soissons and her sister the Duchesse de Bouillon—the one of poisoning her husband, and the other of making a similar attempt. The Comtesse de Soissons' reputation being already so seriously compromised, this accusation of La Voisin seriously impressed the Court. Early in 1680, after the *Chambre Ardente* had given careful consideration to the matter, it officially charged Olympe Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons and Marie-Anne-Mancini, Duchesse de Bouillon, with having respectively poisoned and attempted to poison her husband.

Madame de Soissons received warning of the terrible news from her brother-in-law, the Duc de Bouillon, who had been informed of the charge by Louis XIV himself. About eleven o'clock in the evening, the Duke, looking rather pale, appeared in her drawing-room, to find the Countess surrounded by friends, for the most part absorbed in the ruinous game of *basset*. Directly Olympe knew that the accusation had been formally issued, she did not hesitate. Without even waiting to take leave of her friends, she rushed from the room, whispering to the Marquise d'Allyre to follow her ; and, once

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out of ear-shot, she begged the Marquise to help her to collect as much silver and jewellery as she could carry away with her, to pack up for her the most valuable pieces, and to make her own preparations for departure, if she intended to accompany her. As Madame d'Allyre was also compromised, she put her whole heart into the business ; and in a few hours the two women had finished their preparations for a very long journey. Madame de Soissons first went to Madame de Carignan, her mother-in-law, to beg her to take charge of her children, whom she was leaving behind her in Paris ; and then, at three in the morning, accompanied by the Marquise d'Allyre, in a coach drawn by eight horses, departed in all haste from Paris—to which she was never again to return.

While to the trot of her eight horses the Comtesse de Soissons was making for Flanders with all possible speed, the *Chambre Ardente* at Paris was pursuing its labours. On the 29th of January the Duchesse de Bouillon was cited to appear before it ; and, in the full exercise of her sauciness and wit, she successfully routed the Judges and left the Court in triumph.<sup>1</sup> The Court, however, could do nothing in respect to the doubts overhanging the case of Madame de Soissons. Her flight gave rise to the most invidious interpretations ; and the two cases were in no way on a parity, for the Comte de Soissons was dead, and had been abandoned on his death-bed, while the Duc de Bouillon was very much alive, and had even escorted his wife to the seat of justice. Such considerations weighed so heavily against Olympe that they spread from the *Chambre Ardente* to the general public. Everywhere abroad the Countess came into contact with hostile public opinion, and hostelries, both in towns and villages, closed their doors against her. Often she had to sleep on straw, and to listen to the cries of "witch and poisoner" ; and many was the time, on entering or leaving a town, she was subjected by the inhabitants to the infliction of a dance of black cats—a popular manifestation displayed only in the case of indubitable witches. Such a conglomeration of vexations, humiliations, and restraints would certainly have overwhelmed the Countess, had not love, which had

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *Marie Anne Mancini, Duchesse de Bouillon*.

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already played so important a part in her life, come to her aid. The Prince of Parma, Governor of the Netherlands, fell desperately in love with her, and asked nothing better than to be allowed to make her happy—and for many years his chief object in life was to rejoice her heart, and to make her forget the accusations which had caused her so much suffering.

Was there any foundation for these accusations? It is obvious that the Countess did consult La Voisin at the time of her greatest vogue. She most likely went several times to her house, either alone or in the company of the Duchesse de Bouillon. But such visits to La Voisin do not prove that the Comtesse de Soissons poisoned her husband. La Voisin was just as celebrated for her "love-powders" as for her "succession-powders"—and Olympe had the misfortune never to keep her lovers for long. It is probable that what she went to buy with her gold from the celebrated sorceress was the secret how to retain the affections of those she loved, and of Louis XIV in particular, whose indifference to her gave her much pain. But, apart from this, what reason had Olympe to make away with her husband? He never interfered with any of her love affairs; on the contrary, having no suspicion as to their existence, he encouraged all his wife's so-called friendships. Nor is it easier to credit that Olympe could have wished to get rid of her husband for the purpose of marrying again. No one else could have given her so many titles or so vast a fortune, and no one else could have bestowed on her a more genuine devotion. Finally, the existence of her eight children must have been a guarantee for the permanence of her attachment to the Carignan-Soissons family: at any rate, it most certainly ought to have deprived her of all desire to start a new family. Even her love of intrigue cannot be made to explain the crime, for it would have been so easy to accomplish that no possible complications of an interesting order could have arisen out of it. There, therefore, remains in evidence against the Countess, only La Voisin's testimony and her own flight from the Hôtel de Soissons. The testimony of an accused woman, who hopes to save herself by implicating others, is of but little value. The matter of her flight might be more

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difficult to explain were it not for the dramatic imagination of the Countess. Olympe, finding herself accused, felt herself condemned—and thence followed confusion, terror, and a precipitate and irrevocable departure so soon as the Paris Gates were opened.

The Netherlands, however, were not to be the last halting place of Olympe Mancini. A few years after her *liaison* with the Governor, the Prince died; and the Countess had to find shelter elsewhere. This time she selected Spain, but not before she had wandered through Germany and Italy. Charles II was then on the throne of Spain, and his Queen was the French Princess Marie-Louise d'Orléans, the daughter of the delightful Henriette d'Angleterre, Duchesse d'Orléans, who had so fascinated the Court of Louis XIV by her youth and vivacity, and who had suddenly plunged it into grief and mourning by her premature and unlooked-for death (1670). On arriving at Madrid, Olympe was at once desirous of taking her place at Court, but her first friendship in that Capital was with the Austrian Ambassador. Such an intimacy at the moment was all the more natural, owing to the fact that Prince Eugène, the son of Olympe and the Comte de Soissons, was fighting in the cause of Austria. This young man, who was gifted with military genius, had originally asked Louis XIV for a command. The King had contemptuously refused the request; and the Prince, stung to bitterness and anger, joined the Austrian service, with the intention of exerting all his powers to retaliate against France and her King. In all probability the Austrian Ambassador and the Comtesse de Soissons discussed the matter of the young man's feelings, and the affront which he had received at the Court of France—and from that subject, it would have been only natural to pass on to the question of French influence at the Court of Spain, such influence being centralized in the person of the Queen. In as much as Queen Marie-Louise presented an obstacle to any increase of influence on the part of Austria at the Court of Spain, the Austrian Ambassador did not regard her in a very amiable light, and it is to be doubted whether he would have greatly grieved had she even departed this life. This was well understood by the Comtesse de Soissons, and possibly she was quite ready to

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help her new friend, whose country was treating her son so well, with any little kindness in her power. However this may have been, Olympe contrived to get intimate with the Queen; and, beyond that, to advise her on her health, recommending to her a certain remedy of sovereign efficacy in respect to the troubles of which the Queen was complaining. The young Queen followed the advice of the Countess—and, within a week of the beginning of their intimacy, she was dead, having died suddenly in her twenty-sixth year (12th of February, 1689).

This death stirred the Court of Spain in the same way as, nineteen years before, Madame's death had stirred the Court of France. As had happened in the case of the Duchesse d'Orléans, so now again the word "poison" was whispered round about the bed of the Queen of Spain,—and the Comtesse de Soissons was generally suspected. It was said that the woman who had poisoned her own husband had now seized the opportunity to avenge herself on Queen Marie-Louise for Louis XIV's disdain for her son, and also for the way Henriette d'Angleterre, Duchesse d'Orléans, had triumphed over her in the past. On two occasions Madame had been successful in her rivalry with Olympe—in the first place, when she had robbed her of Louis XIV's affections, and in the second, when she had done the same in respect to Monsieur de Vardes. And it was recognized that the Countess was wholly on the side of Austria, and how greatly the Queen's death would serve its cause in Spain. All such suspicions did not result in any actual charge being brought against the Countess; but they necessitated her leaving Spain.

So the woman who at one time had had hopes of being Queen of France became once more a wanderer through Europe. From Spain she moved to England, where she was well received at the Court of Charles II. But the pleasures of society were gradually losing their attraction for Olympe. Her interests and attention were now concentrated on the military exploits of her son, Prince Eugène. In 1701 he had gained a victory at Chiari over Villeroy. In conjunction with Marlborough, he won the battle of Hochstead in 1704, and in 1705 he was again victorious at Turin. Olympe, when she returned to the Netherlands, freely luxuriated in

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her son's successes, knowing that through them she was balancing her account with France. She lived to see her son and Marlborough gain the great victory of Oudenarde (11th of July, 1708) ; and it must have been one of the last great emotions in the life of Olympe Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons, for she died at Brussels on the 9th of October of the same year.

Although she was a Princess of Savoy, neither the Court nor the King of France went into mourning for her. It was Louis XIV's deliberate purpose to ignore the death of the mother of his great enemy—the man who was so gravely undermining his prestige. In addition to this, in his eyes she was a poisoner, and would always remain so, and as a consequence, she was in his opinion deserving neither of sympathy nor regret.

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# HORTENSE MANCINI

## DUCHESSE DE MAZARIN

[1646-1699]

Those who turn from the stories of mere men and women to the histories of nations in the endeavour to estimate the results which the lives of individuals have produced, either in the genesis or modification of historical events, find themselves peculiarly, if not uniquely, interested in the life of Cardinal de Mazarin. Some interest takes its origin in the fact that Mazarin's political influence was almost equalled by what might be termed his romantic influence, both direct and indirect. Had Anne of Austria not loved the Cardinal,<sup>1</sup> France would not have had the Fronde—and had not Mazarin had five nieces, famed for their beauty and fascination, French history, and that of its three neighbouring countries, would not have been quite the same.

The particular niece to which this essay is devoted—as a consequence of her matrimonial troubles—for a long period of several years engrossed the attention of the Court and the French nobility, disturbed the placid course of Parliaments, metamorphosed the Court of Savoy, and made her influence felt in England. She was born in Rome on the 6th of June, 1646, and received in baptism the name of Hortense. As a child, she was apathetic; and, when she arrived in France in 1653, she was still a very insignificant little person. She was sent for two years to the Convent of La Visitation of Paris, but made but little progress; so, together with her young sister Marie-Anne, she was put under the charge of Madame de Venel, an instructress of willing disposition and much perseverance. But Hortense continued in her careless indolence, though, on the other hand, her physique developed rapidly, and she grew into a remarkably beautiful girl.

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *La Duchesse de Longueville*.



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Hortense was one of the first to perceive it, and to take delight in her own beauty. Her nonchalance ripened into elegance, and, though she remained quite indifferent to her studies, she experienced the keenest pleasure in admiring herself and in knowing herself to be admired.

Was it her type of beauty that so particularly captivated Mazarin? Or did the Cardinal, who had a poor opinion of women, consider that his niece's attitude of nonchalance was indicative of her making an obedient spouse? What is quite certain is that, for some reason which he never explained, he selected Hortense for the perpetuation of his name and titles, and as principal heiress to his immense wealth. Her husband was to receive the title of Duc de Mazarin, and would in the natural course of events enter into possession of the Minister's millions and his magnificent collections of art. For it was the husband, and not Hortense herself, who was to possess all this wealth. Mazarin, though affecting to make Hortense his heiress, had too great a suspicion of the sex to permit of his putting an immense fortune into the hands of a woman. In spite of this restriction—or more probably in consequence of it—Hortense became one of the best matches in France. Beauty and fortune combined to make her eminently desirable, and crowds of suitors arrived upon the scene.

The first to appear was the son of Charles I of England, who, two years later, was to become Charles II. He was not, however, sufficiently French to please Hortense—nor sufficiently certain of regaining his throne to prove satisfactory to her uncle. Mazarin himself inclined to Turenne, and had him sounded on the matter. But the illustrious General, having no intention of marrying a Mancini, politely and quietly ignored the overture. The Duke Charles-Emmanuel of Savoy, on the contrary, professed himself deeply enamoured—but he was rejected. Greater favour was accorded to the Comtes de Coligny, de Lauragais, and de la Feuillade; but unfortunately all these gentlemen were resolved on marrying true-born Frenchwomen. On the other hand, Peter Braganza, who was soon to become Peter II of Portugal, solicited the hand of the beautiful heiress; but he, too, was rejected, as was also the Prince de Courtenay. Hortense preferred



HORTENSE MANCINI  
(A Niece of Cardinal Mazarin's) , Duchess of Mazarin



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Armand de la Porte, Marquis de la Meilleraie, Grand Master of the Ordnance, to them all.

Although the Marquis de Meilleraie had already successively aspired to the hands of Marie and Olympe Mancini, he was now hopelessly in love with Hortense. "Could I but know the intense happiness of marrying her", he said, "it would matter little to me were I to die in six months' time". As a matter of fact, he was not going to die in so short a period—though it would have been better for Hortense if he had.

The marriage took place on the 28th of February, 1661. The festivities in its honour were in every way worthy of the prodigious wealth which the young couple would one day possess, the exalted position of the uncle who was providing the funds, and the rank and titles of the husband.

However, amid the unrivalled splendour of the occasion nothing struck the Parisians so much as the incomparable beauty of the bride. The loveliness of Hortense was of so dazzling and exquisite a nature that no one, apparently, paused to consider her features in detail. Were her eyes blue or black—had she a brilliant colouring or was her complexion pearly white—was her nose impressive or roguish? : we do not know. But we know that Madame de la Fayette wrote of her as follows : " She was not only the most beautiful of the Cardinal's nieces, but she was the most beautiful of all the Court beauties. Had she been gifted with more intelligence, and a greater vivacity of manner, she would have been perfect. Not that everyone considered that a weak point in her, for many people found her careless attitude and languid manner a distinct attraction ".

The new Duc de Mazarin's appearance did not compare favourably with that of his brilliant young wife. Madame de Sévigné wrote four or five days after the marriage : " La Meilleraie's face will provide a good excuse for his wife". However, Saint-Simon, less hasty and more tolerant in his opinion of the Duc de Mazarin, wrote : " I am told that no one could be more agreeable and intelligent ; that he was the best of company, highly cultured, fond of display, eclectic in his tastes, a thoroughly good sort, gracious, affable, and polite". But such reflections unfortunately throw no fresh

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light on the only point that Madame de Sévigné criticized, namely the bridegroom's face.

The happy bridegroom, on the 28th of February, 1661, acquired not only a wife, whom he loved intensely, but also, in addition to the title of Duc de Mazarin, the governments of Alsace and Brittany and of the Fortress of Vincennes. Six days later, Mazarin's death gave him an inheritance of nineteen-million francs, an immense quantity of precious stones of great value, all the Cardinal's magnificent furniture, splendid galleries of painting and sculpture, and unique collection of objets d'art. The young couple, then, started life under the most brilliant auspices, with glowing prospects for the future. Wealth, love, respect, youth, and beauty—all combined together to bring them happiness.

For five years Hortense strove to believe in the completeness of her happiness. Without having for the Duke the ardent passion which he had for her, a passion, by the way, entirely foreign to her nature, Hortense loved her husband sincerely. She had no greater joy than to have him beside her, and to realize that her every action was a source of pleasure to him. During these five years she presented him with four children, three of whom were extremely pretty little girls. But the tyrannical jealousy of the Duke, to which was soon to be added a narrow and fanatical piety, destroyed the happiness of the young couple. Armand de Mazarin became jealous of everything Hortense did, of everything she thought, desired, liked, or even touched. If Hortense gave an order to a servant, the Duke countermanded it, because no one else but himself was allowed to do anything for his wife or afford her the slightest gratification. His idea was that Hortense should have no other pleasure in the world than to delight in the presence of her husband, to smile on him sweetly, and to bask in the sunshine of his tender solicitude. Any such notion that the Duchess could go for a drive without him was insupportable to him. Every time that Hortense gave the order for the carriage, the Duke imperiously countermanded it, and had the effrontery afterwards to return to his Duchess and to joke with her regarding the tyrannies of his own ruthless love, which were crushing her. No man was permitted to pay the Duchess

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a second visit. If he attempted to do so, the door remained obstinately closed to him. No exception to this rule was allowed, even in the case of Louis XIV. In fact, the King having attempted to visit Hortense for the second time, the Duc de Mazarin hurried his wife off to a distance from the Court, and imposed on her the first series of those incessant and distressing peregrinations which affected her health equally with her patience and any possibility of happiness. "He kept me incessantly on the move, travelling through his estates and provinces", she herself has written, "and barely stopping anywhere. During the first three or four years I made three journeys into Alsace, and the same number into Brittany, not to mention others to Nevers, into Le Maine, to Bourbon, Sedan, and goodness knows where—always in the carriage, being jolted about, and vainly imploring for mercy. Many times I have had to do this for a full two hundred leagues, when I was enceinte and even approaching the date of my confinement".

Wherever Hortense had any acquaintances, the jealousy of the Duke boiled over, causing him to resort to any pretext whereby he could isolate the unfortunate woman and retain her in the grip of an implacable passion, which was becoming a positive torture to her. The Duke even arrived at a point *when he became jealous of his own children, and forbade his wife even to kiss them or to pay them any attention whatever.* If Hortense transgressed his orders, he retaliated by whipping the children, considering that they had robbed him of some of the affection which he insisted should be given wholly to himself.

About the same time that the Duke's jealousy had thus reached a point bordering on insanity, his fantastic and inordinate piety led him into acts of a ridiculous and alarming character. A fire having broken out in his palace, he caused the servants who attempted to extinguish it to be flogged, even thrashing them himself, under the belief that they were interfering with the will of God. He also took it into his head that many of the marble statues bequeathed to him by the Cardinal were indecent and calculated to give rise to evil thoughts; and several of the canvasses by Titian and Coreggio were similarly condemned—and it at once became

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an obligation upon him to destroy, by means of hammer and scissors, such incitements to sin. Beneath his frenzied blows some of the most beautiful statues in the Mazarin collection fell into dust ; and the scissors perpetrated the same artistic sacrilege on the canvasses of the masters.

But the craziness of the Duke did not stop there. He determined to put into effect the New Testament teaching as to the relation between the first and the last—and to this purpose he made all his retainers draw lots for their respective employments. In this way, the steward of the household became the cook, a scrubber of floors was raised to the rank of secretary, and a cow-herd found himself waiting at table. At the same time the Duke issued an order to all his private estates and Provinces under his government forbidding unmarried women to milk cows, or children to herd swine, and ordering all celibates to abstain from labour calculated to give rise to sinful thoughts. This same order also directed all women under his vassalage to accustom their babies to abstinence, by refusing to suckle them on Fridays or other fast days.

His scruples also began to trouble him regarding the origin of the late Cardinal's fortune. He embarked in three hundred actions at law, in order to convince himself as to the manner in which Mazarin had acquired the greater part of his possessions. He even went so far as to threaten Louis XIV with the divine wrath, in the presence of the Court, on the matter of his love for Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Armand de Mazarin declared that an angel straight from heaven had warned him that, if the King persisted in making himself a subject for scandal before his people, a most terrible chastisement would be forthcoming. But by that time the Duke's eccentricities were too well recognized, and his religious absurdities and jealous vagaries too openly discussed, for Louis to take his action seriously.

Even in his own home the Duc de Mazarin's power of fascination was not now of such a nature as to have made it impossible for Hortense to conceive of happiness without him. His cruelties, selfishness, and tyrannical jealousy had destroyed all affection in his wife's heart—and matters had arrived at such a pitch that the slightest thing would have

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proved sufficient to drive the Duchess into conjugal revolt. Armand de Mazarin was not long in providing the necessary stimulus. After having declared sculpture and painting to be the work of the devil, the Duke came to a similar opinion with regard to precious stones. Hortense possessed most beautiful jewellery, to which she was particularly attached, realizing to the full how brilliantly it emphasized her own beauty. So the Duke, in order to remove from her all temptation of utilizing it to her personal adornment, confiscated the whole lot. Hortense, furious and exasperated against a husband who was tormenting her to death, appealed to Louis XIV in respect to this confiscation. The King supported the Duchess ; but, with the purpose of mollifying the Duke, instead of having the jewels handed back to the Duchess, he ordered them to be placed in Colbert's safe custody. It was a decision which solved nothing. It left Monsieur de Mazarin extremely displeased, and Hortense wholly unsatisfied ; and their mutual sense of irritation led almost immediately to fresh complications.

More outrageous than ever, the Duke spoke of having his daughters' front teeth taken out, so as to disfigure them, and thus prevent them from becoming incentives to sin. He desired at the same time to relegate his wife to one of his Provinces, where, separated from the King and Court, and from all news and distractions, she would have an opportunity to repent of her conduct. Hortense, maddened by such a prospect, and by the cruelty of a husband, who faced without flinching the conception of martyrizing his children, determined at any cost to escape from his authority, realizing that her flight would place her in a better position to safeguard her children from the barbarities of their father. So, putting together all that remained of her jewellery and the few rouleaus of pistoles that she possessed, she fled to the Hôtel de Soissons, the house of her sister Olympe (1666).

The Comtesse de Soissons, filled with sympathy for Hortense's plight, promised her sister to exert all her powers of protection in the prevention of the Duke's interference with respect to her nieces' teeth—a promise which she strictly fulfilled. But Olympe was not wholly at ease with regard to the question of keeping her sister for any length of time at the



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Hôtel de Soissons. She was worried as to the view the King might take of the matter. In leaving the Hôtel de Mazarin, Hortense had put herself in the wrong, for she had conspired against the law of Church and State, which ordained obedience for wives—and Louis XIV was not fond of conspirators, while the Comtesse de Soissons was most anxious to court his favour. So Olympe attempted to effect a reconciliation between husband and wife. It was not a success. Hortense was too inebriated by her unwonted sense of liberty, contrasting so fundamentally with the tyranny of her husband, deliberately to return to her original fetters. But, conscious of her continued presence in the Hôtel de Soissons proving a worry to her sister, the Duchesse de Mazarin sought refuge with her husband's aunt, the Superior of the Abbaye de Chelles, from which point of vantage she intended to commence an action for judicial separation against the Duke.

The Duc de Mazarin, however, after having proceeded into Alsace, where he partially recovered from the first burst of fury which had assailed him on the news of his wife's flight, about this time returned to Paris. Having ascertained the whereabouts of Hortense, he at once betook himself to Chelles, in the hopes that his aunt, the Abbess, would support him in his wrath against his recalcitrant spouse, and would assist him in bringing the Duchess to heel. He was gravely disappointed, for the Abbess on the contrary was loud in her praises of Hortense. Monsieur de Mazarin in a fury rushed to Versailles to beg the King to deal with his wife, as she undoubtedly deserved. The scandal which had ensued as a consequence of this family quarrel was very displeasing to Louis XIV; and he was of opinion that, if the action which Hortense intended to take were once to commence, it would be greatly enhanced. So, to delay the action and to pacify the Duc de Mazarin, the King directed the President of the Parliament to order the Duchess to retire into the Convent of Sainte-Marie-de-la-Bastille.

The house which Louis XIV had thus assigned to the Duchess in no way resembled the Abbaye de Chelles. While Hortense had lived only with women of her own class at Chelles, in an atmosphere of the highest refinement, at Les Filles de Sainte-Marie-de-la-Bastille she was brought into

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indiscriminate contact with much that was discourteous and unpleasant. The Superior and nuns of the convent had been deliberately prejudiced against the Duchess, and were accordingly determined to be extremely strict with her, applying to her with rigid severity all the hard and rigorous rules of the establishment. Hortense would have, therefore, suffered greatly at Sainte-Marie-de-la-Bastille had not she had the good luck to come across a charming woman, as full of fun as herself—the Marquise de Courcelles, whose husband had had her shut up under the pretext of her culpability in respect to various imaginary misdemeanours, but in reality to enable him to enjoy without interruption the delectable charms of a mistress, who, for the moment, had all his attention. The Marquise was aware that the *liaison* in question would not last very long; though, had she been informed to the contrary, she would not have been greatly disturbed. Her one object at Sainte-Marie-de-la-Bastille was to devise means whereby to enliven her sequestered existence, and she induced Hortense to join her in her merry jests. The two ladies found the greatest amusement in playing countless pranks at the expense of the nuns. One day they replaced all the ink in the ink-stands with plain water, and on another they threw the whole community into confusion by counterfeiting, with the aid of their cotton sheets, the appearance of a genuine suicide.

Hortense, however, had to face tragedies of a different order from those created by the imagination of the Marquise de Courcelles. Her husband attempted a reconciliation. With the determination to compel his wife to follow him, he presented himself at the convent *grille*. Though very coldly received, he was not discouraged—and Hortense, seized with fear at the thought of again falling under his domination, hastened to commence her action, which had been delayed by her having had to change her convent. Monsieur de Mazarin, to circumvent the action, resolved to kidnap his wife at once; and one night he, together with his men, attacked the Convent of Les Filles de Sainte-Marie-de-la-Bastille. The attack proved a failure, the doors remaining closed, and the Duke's men finding it impossible to scale the walls. The alarm, however, had been acute—so acute that the Duchess dared not await at Sainte-Marie a further attempt on the part of her

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husband. Without troubling herself to ask permission from the Mother Superior, and probably with the complicity of Madame de Courcelles, she freed herself from her shackles, and took to her heels.

For some days no one knew where the Duchess had gone—but, while all this was going on, the *Chambre des Requêtes* accorded to the molested wife permission to occupy the *Palais Mazarin*. The Duke was compelled to take up his quarters at the *Arsenal*, the office of the Grand Master of the Ordnance. The *Chambre des Requêtes* likewise ordered the Duke to make a large allowance to his wife so long as the action remained pending. Such measures marked the beginning of a separation, the very thought of which unhinged the Duke's brain. Each day, more insanely desirous of gaining possession of his wife, he passed from violent bursts of jealousy to states of utter prostration. He was so mad that he did not understand that his passion for Hortense was about the last thing to induce her to return to him. Hardly had she settled into the *Hôtel de Mazarin* than he hastily despatched Polastron, his devoted Captain of the guard, to solicit an interview. The Duchess did not refuse the interview, but she insisted that it should be strictly official, given in the presence of witnesses, and confined to legal matters only. After this first interview, Polastron returned every day to solicit a fresh one. They were all accorded, but, as originally arranged, they were conducted in a precise and formal manner.

The Duke, however, could no longer contain himself. He wanted his wife—and have her he would. Besides, was he not her husband—and, if so, was he not her master? He, at any rate, demonstrated the fact by causing a theatre which Hortense had had erected in the *Palais Mazarin*, for the purpose of presenting comedies to her friends, to be demolished. Day and night the Duke's men mounted guard over the gateway of the Palace, with sentries placed around the walls. One night a servant leaving the Palace at a very late hour was presumed to be a lover of the Duchess, and was killed on the spot.

At this news, all the old fears reawoke in Hortense. She felt it imperative to place herself beyond the reach of her husband. The *Palais Mazarin* offered no guarantee for her

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safety. She did not know how the Grand Chambre would decide her case. It might even be that she would have to take up again her old life with the Duke. The very thought of it made her tremble from head to foot. Anything, rather than accede to such a decision ! Bringing all her energies into play, she appealed to her brother, the Duc de Nevers, and to some of her friends, the best known of whom was the Chevalier de Rohan, for help ; and, disguised as a man, she left her splendid Palace on foot during the night of the 13th of June, 1667. At the gates of Paris her friends were waiting to escort her. A saddled horse was standing ready. Without pausing a moment, she sprang into the saddle, and galloped at full speed in the direction of Lorraine.

When the Duke was given to understand that his wife had escaped him for the second time, and in a more mysterious and upsetting fashion than ever, he nearly died of rage. Cursing and swearing, he smashed everything within his reach, till it became a question whether he would go raving mad or succumb to apoplexy. At three o'clock in the morning, however, he came to a decision. He would seek out the King, and beg for help and justice. His persistence was so violent that finally Louis XIV had to be roused from his sleep to listen to Charles-Armand de Mazarin. The Duke entered the King's presence in his night-cap—and with convulsive countenance, incoherent speech, and confused gestures, screamed out his rage, weeping with grief. It was a splendid opportunity for Louis XIV to pay the Duke back for the way he had but lately threatened him in the presence of his courtiers. As it happened, several of these self-same courtiers were near at hand on duty on this particular night—and Louis XIV grew merry at the thought of making them share the humour of the situation by witnessing the chance of reprisal which circumstances had given him. As Monsieur de Mazarin was continuing his lamentations, the King, with a sardonic smile on his lips, reminded the Duke that the angel who had so accurately warned him in respect to the royal chastisement ought similarly to have acquainted him with the plans of Madame de Mazarin. To him it seemed altogether unaccountable that he should have kept silent on such a point. The courtiers were delighted at the royal tit-for-

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tat, and on the next day the following quatrain was circulated round Versailles :

" Came Mazarin most passionate, a night-cap for a hat,  
' My dearest wife has gone, alas, and where we can't find out '  
' You mean to tell me,' said the King, ' that you are still in  
doubt ?  
The Angel that you talk about can surely tell you that ' ".<sup>1</sup>

This angel might also have told Monsieur de Mazarin that the Duc de Lorraine had made every arrangement required by Hortense for the continuance of her journey through Switzerland into Italy. But at Nancy she bade adieu to her escort, and pursued her way towards Rome, accompanied only by her brother and her equerry. This equerry was very enamoured of the Duchess, and she took good care to keep him in the best of tempers. The journey, therefore, might have offered certain consolations, despite its great fatigue, had Hortense not had a very painful accident *en route*. She broke her leg—but, in spite of her suffering, had the courage to remain in the saddle, for they were approaching the end of their journey. Prince Palliano, the Constable Colonna, and his wife, the Princess (Marie Mancini, Hortense's sister), came as far as Milan to meet the fugitive. All necessary steps were taken in regard to her broken limb ; and, when Hortense had quite recovered, they took the road to Rome. Everything would have progressed right merrily had it not been for the extravagant adoration of the equerry. The Constable begged his sister-in-law to get rid of him. Hortense was extremely annoyed at the suggestion ; but, shortly afterwards, the young man's infatuation having most culpably overshot the mark; she was compelled to dismiss him. The Duchess, however, could not bring herself to forgive the Colonnas for having interfered in a matter of so delicate a nature ; and, growing restless under their protection, she left them, to take up her abode, first with an uncle, and then with an aunt—but with neither of them could she agree.

And then Hortense began to think more leniently of her husband. After all he loved her. Indeed, everything that she

<sup>1</sup> " *Vient Mazarin coiffé, mais d'un bonnet de nuit :  
Ma chère femme . . . Hélas ! qu'est-elle devenue ?  
La chose, dit le roi, vous est-elle inconnue ?  
L'ange qui vous dit tout vous l'aura bientôt dit.*"

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could reproach him with had had in the first instance its origin in the superabundance of his love. Her recent experiences had robbed her former fears of something of their force—and she had forgotten how greatly she had dreaded coming again under her husband's authority. So, worried by money difficulties and family complications and wearying of her nomadic and unsettled mode of life, she finally made proposals of peace to the Duke, and went to await his reply in a convent at Rome.

But time had not abated the anger of the Duke. Though still attached to his wife, he desired to punish her severely for her flight. Instead, therefore, of writing to Hortense, as she had expected him to do, he sent an order that she was to do penance for two years in her present convent, adding that on its conclusion he would see what was to be done. At the same time Monsieur de Mazarin made the Abbess of the convent responsible for her safe custody. And so a new prison closed around Hortense. The Duchess, feeling the full horror of the new situation, at once resolved to escape. She had by this time patched up her squabble with Marie Colonna, who, by the by, in her turn was beginning to find that husbands are apt to abuse their powers; and by the aid of her sister, Hortense succeeded in fleeing from the Roman convent in the same way as she had fled from Sainte-Marie-de-la-Bastille. The shock due to the discovery of the escape affected the Abbess so gravely that it ultimately caused her death. Hortense, on the other hand, decided that she would try to obtain at close quarters what she had failed to get at a distance. She felt that her husband would no longer oppose her once he saw her. So her aim was to leave Italy with her brother in the same way as they had entered it, although, since that date, they had quarrelled. The Duc de Nevers was on the point of leaving for France, for the purpose of marrying Diane de Thianges, a niece of Madame de Montespan, and he joyfully welcomed his sister's advances; and the two set out together, determined on having a right merry journey.

Both the brother and sister enjoyed themselves greatly, taking advantage of every opportunity of amusement that presented itself, and in this way the odyssey of their return journey lasted no less than six months. But finally they

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arrived at Nevers, where, to the great stupefaction of Hortense, she found herself confronted by a warrant of arrest, which had been entrusted to the terrible but ever faithful Polastron. The Duc de Mazarin had obtained the warrant immediately he had learned that his wife had escaped from the convent in Rome. Hortense, however, eluded the execution of the warrant by disguising herself as a shepherdess ; and in this manner she reached Versailles, where she was received by the King at Madame de Montespan's. Louis XIV was anxious to avoid the Duchess being placed in solitary confinement, and offered her two alternatives—either to intervene himself to effect a reconciliation between herself and the Duke, or to give her an annual allowance of twenty-four-thousand francs, to enable her to live in Rome. The Duke's last attempt had reawakened all her former fears, and had reminded her again forcibly of the true nature of her husband. So, despite the King's preference for a reconciliation between the two, she chose the allowance, her one thought being to get safely across the frontier. Louis XIV assisted her to get there. While she remained concealed in Colbert's house, a writ of suspension was issued in her favour ; and, as a consequence of such writ, the Duchess was enabled to cross France once more, and to enter Italy, when a fresh warrant for her arrest was issued immediately. And once again the dissensions of the Mazarin couple provided entertainment for the Court, and became the common talk of all Paris and Versailles.

Hortense, however, was not to remain for long in Italy. On her arrival there, she found the Colonnas in open rupture. The Constable had, in fact, become as jealous of his wife as the Duc de Mazarin was of Hortense. The Princess' past at the Court of France,<sup>1</sup> combined with her subsequent caprices, had robbed him of all confidence in his wife. A time came when all her movements were strictly watched, and her personal liberty was gradually curtailed day by day. Maric, who had only married the Constable Colonna under pressure from her uncle, the Cardinal, as a consequence of Louis XIV's decision that she was to leave the Court of France, had never really loved the Prince. At first, the wealth and luxury of her surroundings had lent her certain illusions, but her heart had

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *Marie Mancini*.

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never been really touched. But, when it came to the Prince speaking to her authoritatively and informing her that he expected to be loved exclusively, she realized the thing to be impossible. She preferred poverty without him to wealth dependent on a slavish fidelity, such as robbed her of all the liberty she loved. And it was in that condition of mind that she asked her sister, Hortense, to fly with her from Italy, and to take the risk as to what might happen to them in France. The adventurous spirit of Hortense hailed the project with delight, and the undertaking was warmly welcomed.

The two ladies rightly decided that their flight would be impracticable under their own names ; so they arranged to dress in men's clothes, and take plebeian names. Under this double disguise, they reached Civita Vecchia, from which place they intended to embark for France. A great storm was raging at the time they arrived at the port, and the prudent fishermen had brought their boats into shelter ; and none of them would put out to sea until the wind had subsided. However, time was pressing : Should the Constable discover the direction of his wife's flight, he might appear at any moment to prevent her departure. Marie desired at any cost to prevent such a *dénouement*, which would have been nothing short of a catastrophe. The two women ran distractedly among the fishermen, begging and imploring them with offers of large sums of money, to take them across to France ; but without effect. The wind continued to howl ; the men remained obstinate in their refusal ; and Marie, in her fear of pursuit, was glancing about her in terror. Then Hortense resolved to sacrifice a still larger portion of their resources ; and two fishermen, overpowered by the greatness of the bribe, agreed to attempt the hazardous venture.

This passage across to France, on the part of the Princesse de Palliano and the Duchesse de Mazarin, was one of the most tragical that had ever been made. The tempest, far from subsiding, gradually increased in violence, and the light craft carrying the fugitives, at the mercy of wind and wave—at times, lying flat on its side, and at others being almost wholly swamped—seemed inevitably doomed to destruction. The fishermen determined to return to port ; but Marie and Hortense frenziedly implored them to pursue their way ; and



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both men crossed themselves, earnestly convinced that only women who had assassinated the Pope could conceivably desire to take to flight in such a veritable tornado. But even the tempest was not the greatest obstacle that was to confront them. Vainly had their teeth chattered with cold as they lay in their torn, drenched clothes—vainly were their hands, legs, and faces stained with blood through the terrific battering of the felucca, in its strenuous efforts to surmount the waves—for a greater, and yet more grievous peril was upon them: the galley which the Constable Colonna, in his fury, had sent in pursuit of his wife. The fishermen were the first to perceive it; but the two sisters alone at once realized its true significance, and the extreme danger of the moment. Their explanations, however, soon awakened their companions to the naked truth of the situation. Rare old salts, trained to the sea from their birth, they manœuvred their little craft so well—baffling the heavy galley with their sudden tacks and twists and turns—and handled their vessel with such consummate dexterity that finally their coolness and courage outwitted their pursuer, and they were out of danger. But they eluded the galley only to find themselves confronted by a still greater danger. At that period the Mediterranean was infested by Turkish pirates; and one of these appeared in pursuit of their frail craft. The plucky fishermen, who devoutly hoped that they were conducting the two sisters to ultimate happiness, were able to escape this fresh danger only by repeating the same tactics as they had employed in respect to the galley. Finally, the felucca was wrecked on the rocks near Marseilles. The two unfortunate women had been eight days in the boat since leaving Civita Vecchia, and they were not only in an emaciated condition, but were barely covered by the miserable rags which were all that remained to them of their original clothes (1672). Their arrival was reported to Monsieur de Grignan, the Governor of La Provence, and the description of the condition of the two noble ladies was such that he requested his wife to despatch to them complete outfits, down to the very skin.

However, such keen and manifold sufferings were destined to bring neither happiness to Hortense nor tranquillity to Marie. The Princesse de Palliano, feeling convinced that she would arouse in Louis XIV a tender and active sense of

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sympathy, decided, when her strength would permit it, to seek him out at Fontainebleau ; and Hortense came to the conclusion that she could not do better than accompany her sister. But at Montpellier they were informed that Polastron, the Duke's indefatigable Captain of the Guard, was searching for them with the purpose of arresting Hortense on the fatal warrant which he still held against her—and, to escape the pitiless Polastron, it was imperative that they should immediately separate. So the Princesse de Palliano continued her route towards Fontainebleau alone. Unfortunately for her, Louis XIV was at that moment with the army in Flanders, and Queen Marie-Thérèse was performing the functions of Regent. On hearing that the woman who had been the first to come between her and the King was approaching the Court, Marie-Thérèse sent a confidential officer to meet her. He took with him a *lettre-de-cachet* ; and, meeting her some leagues from Fontainebleau, he arrested her, and conducted her as a prisoner to the Abbaye de Lys ; from which place, at a slightly later date, she was moved to that of Avençy. When Louis XIV was informed as to what had happened, he entirely approved of the Queen's action. But Marie Mancini, however, was only to remain for a few months a prisoner in France. Louis XIV released her on the condition that she was not to remain on French soil. She went, returned once more, was again sent back, and finally fell into the hands of her husband, who kept her a prisoner in various convents, so long as he lived—that is, to 1684.

Hortense had been more fortunate than her sister in her efforts. Not only had she contrived to elude Polastron, but, under the guise of a pedlar, she had managed to reach Le Dauphiné without hindrance, and thence to pass on into Savoy. The Duc Charles-Emmanuel II, who reigned over Savoy, had been one of Hortense's original suitors ; and, though he had been rejected as a husband by the superb niece of Mazarin, far from bearing a grudge against the pretty girl, he had always preserved for her a feeling of tenderness and admiration. When he saw her again at the end of 1672, the full warmth of his love for her broke out afresh. Not only was he charmed to see her in his country,

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but he begged of her never to leave it, installing her at Chambéry in what amounted to a second Court. Therein the Duchesse de Mazarin became the Queen of artists, philosophers, and men of letters. The Abbé de Saint-Réal was captivated by her beauty, and became her slave. He initiated her into all the fascinations of history, and awakened her mind to the treasures of the intellect, thus bringing to her latent intelligence the activity which had never been aroused. Thanks to his labours, Charles-Emmanuel—superb patron of arts and letters—joyfully discovered in his friend, in addition to the exquisite beauty which had captivated him in 1660, an attractive intelligence, which, at length liberated from the apathy that had characterized it, possessed all the enthusiasms, audacities, and originality of first youth. Hortense acquired at Chambéry the sole thing that was needed to make her irresistible—mental-development, and a passion for the acquisition of knowledge. And certainly the years she passed at Chambéry were the most profitable in her life.

Charles-Emmanuel regarded the Duchesse de Mazarin as the brightest ornament of the Duchy. No entertainment was ever given at Turin without the Duke begging her to adorn it with her beauty, charm, and wit. The Duchess of Savoy, however, was keenly jealous of Hortense's triumphs and of the Duke's devotion to her. But Charles-Emmanuel did not permit his wife to attack the splendid foreigner by so much as a hostile glance of the eye. So Hortense reigned in Savoy like a Queen—happy, admired, and free from care. Encouraged by her affectionate sympathy, Saint-Réal achieved an immense success on the publication of the best known of his work, *Conjurations des Espagnols contre Venise* (1674); and Hortense rejoiced in the distinction and satisfaction it brought to the man who had made her as remarkable for the qualities of her mind as she had been for her beauty.

Such serenity of happiness, however, was destined not to endure. Towards the end of 1675, and at the comparatively early age of forty-one, Charles-Emmanuel—possibly as a result of some criminal agency<sup>1</sup>—was suddenly taken ill, and died without having made any provision for the Duchesse

<sup>1</sup> See the rôle of Vanens, and his gang, in the chapter on *La Voisin*.

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de Mazarin. His widow, Jeanne de Savoie Nemours, appointed Regent to act for her nine years old son Victor-Amédée II, being thus given the opportunity she had been seeking for months to retaliate on her rival, had it notified to Hortense that she was to quit the country without delay—and so the unfortunate Duchess, who had imagined herself to have found at Chambéry a haven of safety, was once again compelled to take up her old life of peril and unrest. Certainly Saint-Réal would have been ready to accompany and console her, wheresoever she went—but would he, as a matter of fact, have been quite the man successfully to circumvent the manœuvres of the terrible Polastron? And whence were to be obtained the resources to enable the Duchess to *continue living in accordance with her rank*?

However she had to move on! Forced to make a decision, Madame de Mazarin, realizing how kindly received she had been by one of her old admirers, naturally turned her attention to the others who had been in the same boat as Charles-Emmanuel; and, her thoughts fixing themselves in particular on Charles II of England, she almost immediately decided to start and seek his protection.

The journey from Savoy to England was long and difficult, and Hortense regarded it with terror. Many times, *en route*, she shook in her shoes, finding herself within an ace of falling into the clutches of Polastron—but finally she landed in England, and in the early days of the spring of 1676 she made her appearance at Whitehall. Hortense was at that time thirty years old. She was at the height of her radiant beauty, and suffused with joy at having recovered her liberty. No love-entanglement existed to restrain the scope of her feelings or the range of her smile: her whole being breathed freedom and charm. Hers was the bearing of Victory that conquers by Beauty and solidifies her conquest by Refinement and Wit.

The entourage of Charles II, even before she arrived at the Court, foresaw the power she would assuredly wield; and they decided to utilize it to the definite destruction of the unpopular influence of the Duchess of Portsmouth; for she who had once been the pretty, vivacious, and witty Louise de Kérouailles had become an apathetic, dull, and dis-

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heartened woman. No moment could have been more propitious for their purpose, and a cabal was formed at the Court. All the syrens surrounding Charles were to retire into the background before the coming of Hortense, in order to leave the path free for her to the King's heart and to facilitate her ascent into the place of first favourite. Waller's poem of the *Three Duchesses* clearly shows how nearly the scheme succeeded. When, amid the revelry of the dance, the bright flare of the torches and the dazzling gleam of jewels, Charles II saw again the woman whom he had once loved in the tender bud now standing before him in the full bloom of her matured beauty, he was all impatience to declare his heart's surrender.

The whole course of events was changed by a mere caprice on the part of Hortense. Rejecting the arm which Charles II had offered her, she deliberately accepted that of Grimaldi, Prince of Monaco, whose good looks had captivated her at first sight. Charles II, deeply resenting the slight to which she had subjected him, cancelled the pension of four thousand pounds which he had allotted to her on her arrival in England. But owing to the fact that Grimaldi started almost at once for Monaco, and the amiability of Hortense was of a quality including most things, but excluding prudery, Charles II was quite willing to forgive and forget his humiliation, and to give her back the pension which he had cancelled—under the pretence that such gift was merely a repayment of loans advanced to him in the past by Cardinal Mazarin. However, in spite of everything, the scheme miscarried, and the Duchesse de Mazarin never replaced the Duchess of Portsmouth in the King's favour. The "Bill of Exclusion" (1679), directed against the succession of the King's brother, menaced also the Duchess of Portsmouth, who was a Catholic and the protectress of the Catholics in England. The danger of her position brought her into closer touch with the King. Following in the steps of Pericles and his Aspasia, Charles II risked his popularity and his crown to save his faithful mistress from exile. The efforts which he made on her behalf so stimulated his affection for her that by the end of 1681, her ascendancy over him was more complete than ever.

But if the Duchesse de Mazarin did not take the leading

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rôle in the Court, her life in London was just as pleasant as it had been at Chambéry, and she could always reckon on the King's friendship. Charles II placed at her disposal the St. James's Palace Pavilion as a residence ; and she organized her *salon* there, on similar lines to the one she had had in Savoy. Saint-Réal did not remain with her beyond 1678, although the suggestion has been made that he was the actual author of the *Mémoires de la Duchesse de Mazarin*. But his place at St. James's was filled by Saint-Evremond, to everyone's advantage. Banished from the Court of France for having dared to bring his sharp and ready wit to bear on personages of high importance, he had already been for fourteen years in England when Hortense arrived. He had, therefore, an intimate knowledge of all the manners and customs of the place, and was *persona grata* in the very best society, among whom Hortense quickly took up a leading position. At her house were to be found the great names in the peerage, the intellectuals of the time, the Foreign Ministers, Frenchmen of distinction who happened to be in London, artists, and in fact everyone of note in the world of art, letters, birth, and wealth.

Hortense's first ten years in London were extremely brilliant and auspicious. Her beauty seemed unaffected by the march of time, and numbers of men were continually falling in love with her. Among them, the Swedish General Banner had sufficient persuasion and ardour to supplant even Charles II—who, however, died in 1685, leaving to his brother, James II, the duty of continuing the pension to Cardinal Mazarin's niece.

Hortense loved Banner with a passion that knew no bounds ; and she was still in the full tide of this love when her young nephew, the Chevalier de Soissons, came to pay her a visit at the Pavilion of St. James's. It was the first time that he had ever met his aunt, and the effect of her dazzling beauty on him was overwhelming. From the first moment he saw her, he became her slave, anxious only to please so wonderful and adorable a being. He was absolutely crazy about her, and furiously jealous of the Swedish General. Hortense, however, regarded her nephew's passion merely as a boy's folly. Her love for Banner absorbed her so entirely

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that she never realized that the Chevalier's feelings were of a character such as might well drive him to extremities ; and her own attitude did nothing to calm them—for, while she treated her nephew as a pleasant young relative, she lavished, even in his presence, most passionate marks of affection on her lover. Possibly her maternal tenderness towards him was not entirely free from coquetry ; and, in such manner, without paying much attention to the matter herself, she may have exasperated the young man beyond all restraint ; but the fact remains—a day came when the Chevalier challenged the Swedish General to a duel to the death. Banner repaired to the rendezvous with a smile upon his lips, and a feeling almost of compassion for the audacious young man. But the Chevalier de Soissons, like the Rodrigue of Corneille, who happened to be one of his favourite heroes, demonstrated that

“ With men of good birth—who chance to engage—  
True courage is never a question of age.”<sup>1</sup>

With one swift thrust, he killed the General at the beginning of the duel (1686).

The grief of Hortense at the news of the death of the man she loved so passionately was beyond description. Her thoughts flew to suicide—and then to retiring into some cloister where she could weep and pray till she died for the one she had lost. Finally, she contented herself with draping her house in black, consecrating her days to the memory of her sorrow, and refusing to see the unfortunate young man who had inflicted on her so imperishable a grief.

After this terrible duel, the life of the Duchesse de Mazarin was never again the same. Love had gone from it for ever ; and her mind, slowly losing its brilliancy, became at length indifferent to worldly success. The *salon* of Hortense was gradually transformed into a fashionable place of resort for the purposes of gambling. Saint-Evremond still came, as light-heartedly cynical as ever—reading aloud with gusto letters he had received from the charming Ninon, who, despite the passing of the years, remained as light-hearted and full of fun as himself<sup>2</sup>—and reminding Hortense that

<sup>1</sup> “ *aux âmes bien nées,*  
*La valeur n'attend point le nombre des années.*”

<sup>2</sup> See the chapter on *Ninon de Lenclos*.

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she ought to be sending fresh orders to France for her wines and delicacies of the table, through the medium of his epicurean correspondent. But the mistress of the house had changed, and could not respond. Basset, with its gains and losses, was now the only thing capable of arousing her from the apathy into which she had fallen. Even when the revolution of 1688, which hurled James II from his throne, brought home to her the precariousness of her own position, she was not greatly moved. She readily agreed to leave the Pavilion of St. James's for a private house in Chelsea, when William III made known to her what trouble he had had to prevent her expulsion from the kingdom. The new *régime* was desirous of sweeping aside everything that recalled the disorder and effeminacy of the preceding reigns; and, as a consequence, William had not only to deprive her of her residence at St. James's but to reduce her pension by half. But all such disagreeable incidents made little impression on Mazarin's beautiful niece. Basset was even more the mode at Chelsea than at St James's, and that fact alone was sufficient to console Hortense for the loss of her royal abode.

In Paris, however, the English revolution of 1688 had brought hope and comfort to Charles-Armand de la Porte, Duc de Mazarin. A frigid and severe King like William III, he told himself would never allow a foreigner who had been one of the scandals of Charles II's reign to remain in London. The Duke, therefore, perceived the possibility of regaining his wife. He at once directed his legal advisers to reopen the matter of the action which he had brought against the Duchess more than twenty-two years before—and once again the Court revelled in the squabbles of the Mazarins. The action was reopened in 1689 to the delight of all Paris. The Duke's advocate, Erard, occupied three days in presenting to the Court the case of the injured and affectionate husband. His main demand was that Hortense should at once be ordered to take up her abode in the conjugal domicile; and, should she refuse to submit to this primordial condition, she was to be declared "to have forfeited her rights and to be deprived of her dowry". The Duchess was represented by the Advocate Sachot. He asked, on the part of his client, for a ruling that she was not to return to the Palais Mazarin,



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but that she was to be permitted to live in a convent, selected for her by the Duke, but on the understanding that she should live there in separation from him. Sachot also asked for an order condemning the Duke to pay all the numerous debts the Duchess had contracted in England. To this latter point, the Duke at once replied that, whereas the debtors in question were heretics, Madame de Mazarin was at liberty to let them drift into bankruptcy. As to the question of non-cohabitation with her husband, the Duchess obtained a ruling of a mitigant nature. She was empowered to live for six months in any French convent she might choose, the Duke being prohibited from approaching her ; but at the end of that period she was to take up again her joint-life with the Duke. On the other hand, the Duke was ordered by the Judges to pay all his wife's debts, whether in England or elsewhere, so soon as the Duchess should have returned to the conjugal roof.

At the date of this legal decision, Hortense was living at Chelsea by permission of William III, with the promise from him of a pension of two-thousand pounds a year. Being thus assured of the continuance of her tranquil life in England, she did not much disturb herself about a judgment on the part of the Parliament of Paris. But to this judgment there succeeded three others of a much more severe character for her than the first one—resulting in Hortense being placed, without reservation, at her husband's disposal. But, to render such judgments effective, the Duke had to gain possession of the person of his wife—and that was precisely what he was unable to do. Hortense, in the meantime, continued at Chelsea to play basset with heavy stakes, to see Saint-Evremond, to invite to her house everyone who shared her passion for play, and to give dinners, not taking the trouble even to read the judgments which the Parliament of Paris delivered against her.

The Duke was furious—and he continued furious till 1699, when the death of his wife at last delivered her into his hands. Hortense passed away peacefully at Chelsea, at the age of fifty-three, universally regretted by all who had known her. The indefatigable Polastron was soon on her tracks, and at length was enabled to accomplish his mission. He came

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to London to fetch the body of the Duchess, and was permitted to take it back to his master.

When the Duke saw the coffin of the woman who had fled from him more than thirty years before, he burst into passionate weeping, and all his old affection for Hortense returned. He could not contemplate the thought of separating from the dear remains. Since Hortense had robbed him of a part of her marital life, the husband now resolved to recover it from the dead. He determined to take her body to all the places which he loved and there to tell her what their rupture had prevented him from confiding to her before. In such manner did the Duc de Mazarin start forth with the coffin of his wife on a circular tour through all his estates. He conducted it from domain to domain, until he had visited them all, including the châteaux which he had recently acquired. And, after he had finished with his own possessions, the Duke and the coffin visited the Provinces under his government. For a few days he allowed the remains of his wife to rest in Nôtre-Dame Miraculeuse de Liesse, hoping possibly that the Virgin would perform a miracle in his favour, and give him back his wife. And then he recommenced his sad and fantastic pilgrimage, crossing and recrossing France in his senseless promenade for the space of over a year, until finally he gave his sanction for the placing of his wife's coffin in the vault containing the remains of Cardinal Mazarin (1700). In compensation for this ghastly jaunt of death, which his disordered intellect imposed upon the Duchess, the Duke might well have had carved upon her tomb what all her contemporaries were thinking :

"Hortense awoke to life, when Heaven chose to call,  
With grace, and loveliness, and wit—by no means all;  
With qualities of heart—by no means all, e'en now;  
For sho'd a thousand other charms, all men avow."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "*Hortense eut du Ciel en partage  
La grâce, la beauté, l'esprit ; ce n'est pas tout :  
Les qualités du cœur ; ce n'est pas tout encore :  
Pour mille autres appas le monde entier l'adore.*"



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[1641-1707]

The position which Louis XIV held in France and Europe was so great that his every action—one might almost say gesture—has its historical interest. His love-affairs have been investigated no less fully than his battles. Although his mistresses never possessed any real political influence, it is nevertheless indisputable that his partiality towards them altered in some respect the history of his reign. By a strange coincidence, or rather as a logical consequence, the King's character and his sympathies, together with the whole tone of his Court, underwent a change whenever he chose to instal a new Favourite.

In the spring of 1667 the reigning mistress was the gentle and tender La Vallière. Her influence had been limited to enclosing the King in the shrine of her love, to moderating, by the simplicity of her own tastes, his tendency to lavish display, and, without herself suspecting it, to inflating his vanity as a consequence of the measureless adoration and blind obedience that she gave to him. But the tender charms of Louise de la Vallière had lost their hold upon the King, when, a few months earlier, his attention had been attracted at the Court to a woman who was, to quote Saint-Simon "beautiful as the day". To the young King, whose ambition had kept pace with his success, who was about to take for his emblem the Sun itself, and who was now, in popular opinion, so near to the divine that his courtiers saw nothing peculiar in uncovering their heads when crossing his empty room, it had become an obligation to have for his mistress a woman of such beauty as would compel admiration from all who beheld her. His pride had, in fact, become more fastidious than his heart. As a youth, he had begged with tears to be allowed to make Marie Mancini his Queen; a little later his ideal friendship with his sister-in-law, the Duchesse d'Orléans, had flooded his heart

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with happiness; and, lastly, Louise de la Vallière had brought him the ecstasy of her sweet, unselfish, infinite love. And now the time had arrived when Louis XIV, too deeply enamoured of himself to devote his entire heart to a new passion, considered that his mistress above all things should possess qualities calculated to flatter his pride. She had, in fact, to be the most beautiful woman in his kingdom.

Such probably were the feelings, either conscious or unconscious, that contributed to fix his attention on Madame de Montespan, who before her marriage of the 28th January, 1663, had been Mademoiselle de Rochechouart. The beautiful young woman had been at the Court before she had married. She had come there as early as 1660, and had then been known under the name of Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, which she took from the estate where she was born. But, from the first, the young daughter of Gabriel de Rochechouart, Duc de Mortemart, had been unable to gain the attention of the King. Unperceived among the numerous Ladies-in-Waiting of Queen Marie-Thérèse, she would not have had the slightest chance of attracting his notice, unless circumstances could have been so arranged as to enable her to meet him in a more intimate way. And the financial difficulties of the young couple, after marriage, made the Marquise passionately long to arrive at some such arrangement.

When she had married Louis, Henri de Pardailan de Gondrin, Marquis de Montespan, eldest son of the Marquis d'Antin, the Duc de Mortemart had promised her a dowry of one-hundred-and-fifty-thousand francs. But embarrassed by an expensive establishment, and having two other daughters to provide for, the Duke announced, when the moment arrived for payment, that he was not in a position to hand over more than sixty-thousand francs, but he promised to pay interest on the remainder. As a matter of fact, he paid neither capital nor interest—with the result that the young Marquise, who had been brought up in luxury, found herself suddenly reduced to a very different position. To add to the difficulties, the Marquis de Montespan, who was a year younger than his wife and for all practical purposes younger than his years, lent his father the whole amount of the dowry that they actually had received. Thus the whole resources of the young *ménage*



FRANÇOISE ATHÉNAÏS DE ROCHECHOUART DE MORTEMART  
Marquise de Montespan



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were reduced to the interest on this loan, which was paid to them by the Marquis d'Antin with marked irregularity. Such an income was altogether inadequate to maintain them at Court, and to keep up the Château de Montespan, their place in the country near Bellegarde, in the Pyrenées. The Marquise, accordingly, was compelled to resort to numerous devices to keep up appearances ; but, in spite of all her economies, she was utterly unable to make both ends meet.

While she was thus struggling amid her financial embarrassments, Madame de Montespan was galled to the quick at the sight of Louise de la Vallière loaded with honours and wealth. She regarded this girl of no particular ancestry, whom she considered to be totally devoid of beauty, intelligence, or even ambition, in the light of a challenge, almost of an affront to her own youth, dazzling beauty, wit, and noble birth. To take La Vallière's place—to become the superb favourite of the great King—to see heads bowing before the power he would give her—to luxuriate in the wealth and honours which her royal lover would lavish on her—all this became the brooding passion dominating her whole life. Her conjugal vows weighed little in the balance against her considered design ; for Madame de Montespan detested the husband who had reduced her resources to so low a level, and for whom she had never had more than a tolerant affection. And she was equally indifferent to the two children of her marriage—Louis Henri Pardailan, afterwards Duc d'Antin, born in 1665, and a daughter, born in the following year. She wanted to be rich, courted, admired, powerful—to break with a past that belittled her, and to rise to the height of a great King's affections. But her difficulty was how to get into close enough touch with this King, to attract his attention, and to bedazzle him with charms which he did not know even existed.

Louis XIV, at this period, was accustomed to divide his time between the affairs of State and his two ladies—the Queen and Mademoiselle de la Vallière. To attempt to approach him when he was at work would have been mere folly. There only remained, therefore, the hope of becoming acquainted with him at the Queen's or at Louise de la Vallière's. Without hesitation, the Marquise de Montespan employed all her skill and amiability to gain the affection of



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these two women ; and this was easily effected, owing to the fact that both of them were utterly without suspicion, and always anxious to be in a position to offer the King distractions of a varied order when he came to visit them. To have at their side, when the King came for his chat, a person of the exceptional intelligence of Madame de Montespan, whose conversation, at will, could be made humorous, vivacious, ironic, or original, with a power of repartee as unexpected as it was apt, seemed both to the Queen and the Favourite an invaluable piece of good-luck. Madame de Montespan was, accordingly, invited by both ladies to meet the King ; and she showed herself in an even more charming light than they had expected—brilliant, witty, deferring to everyone present, of irreproachable manners, and of admirable restraint. Louis XIV fell under her charm even more quickly than had the Queen or Louise de la Vallière. At the first ripple of her pearly laughter and flash of her wit, she caught his attention, and he remained gazing at her, dazzled by the radiance of her beauty.

The Marquise de Montespan, whom most historians have called Françoise Athénais but to whom H. Baguet in his study *Une Maîtresse du Roi Soleil en Bourbonnais* refuses to credit the latter name, on the ground that it does not appear in the official documents relating to her nor even in her death-certificate, was twenty-seven years old when the King first perceived how beautiful she was. At that time she had been married for four years, and had had two children, and the development of her charm had reached its point of perfection. The splendour of her beauty was beyond discussion. The Princess de Palatine, who was one of the women who detested her the most, has, however, rendered homage to her charms. "Madame de Montespan", she wrote, "has magnificent fair hair, lovely arms, perfectly modelled hands, a sweetly pretty mouth, and a captivating smile". This fair hair of Madame de Montespan was of the red-gold type, and grew in great profusion. Her skin was of dazzling whiteness, which was accentuated by the delicate rose-tint of her cheeks. Her dark eyes were either sparkling or suffused with languor. The pretty mouth, of which La Palatine speaks and to which so many of the ambassadors made reference, had the most tempting lips, as exquisitely curved as could be imagined.

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Her neck and shoulders were superb, and everything about her had distinction and charm. Madame de la Fayette characterized her beauty as "faultless".

The intelligence of the Marquise was on a par with her beauty. She had inherited the proverbially cutting, brilliant, and subtle wit of the Mortemarts, and to all subjects she brought a mental distinction of touch that was quite exceptional. She had a natural gift of eloquence, and the way she expressed herself was always delightful and original. Her method of talking was quite peculiarly her own, and conversations with her on the most ordinary topics at once caught the attention and became alive with interest.

Louis XIV was conscious of all this by the time he had to quit Fontainebleau—the 24th of May, 1667—for the purpose of rejoining the army in Flanders. At the same time, the Marquise de Montespan, who was quite aware of the effect she had produced on the King, was in a fever to precipitate events in her favour. In her impatience at the continuity of the triumph of a rival who exasperated her, she determined to obtain by resort to occult sources what her own charms had failed to procure for her quickly enough.

Paris, at that period, was disturbed by the presence of numbers of strange adventurers of both sexes. Whether alchemists or sorcerers, these adventurers laid claim to the possession of a supernatural power due to their friendly intercourse with the Evil Spirit. The ritual in connection with such intercourse was both complicated and mysterious. Whispers went around as to pacts with the Devil, sacrifices of the newly-born, incantations, sacrilegious masses, and other practices of a dreadful and alarming order. It was even asserted that some of these friends of the Devil could concoct marvellous powders capable of forcibly bringing about the realization of anything that might be wished. Many striking incidents due to such intervention were discussed in low voices; and no one seemed more convinced as to the gravity of such incidents, or as to the supernatural power of the sorcerers and alchemists, than they did themselves. They regarded themselves as men apart, endowed with almost unlimited power, as a consequence of their relations with the Devil.

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As early as 1666 Madame de Montespan had made the acquaintance of one of these alchemists, a man called Vancens, ex-Captain of the galleys, who had enlightened her in respect to these beliefs. Through him she had become acquainted with the most celebrated sorceress of the time, La Voisin, and the Marquise now determined to visit her again. Having resolved to gain Louis XIV's affections at any price, she felt that, instead of merely trusting to her beauty to bring it about, it were better definitely to obtain it through the magic of La Voisin. This time, however, La Voisin put the Marquise into communication with a sacrilegious priest of Saint-Severin, called Mariette, and with a cunning magician, one Lesage, who perhaps was the only one among the whole group of sorcerers who had no belief either in his satanic practices or in his own powers. Madame de Montespan explained to the two men how passionately she desired to replace La Vallière in the King's favour, and how she had vowed a deadly hatred against the Favourite. Then, having been paid heavily for the consultation, the two men decided that the Marquise would have to proceed with them to the Rue de la Tanneries, for the purpose of taking part in certain magic rites which were to be directed against Louise de la Vallière. These rites were duly performed in a room in the street mentioned, where Mariette, clothed in sacerdotal vestments, pronounced the incantation against the reigning favourite, and even against the Queen herself—for La Montespan was also quite willing to replace her—while Lesage sang the *Veni Creator*. The Marquise de Montespan, sinking upon her knees, allowed her head to be utilized as a lectern for the New Testament, and Mariette read from one of the Gospels in a loud voice. But to make certain of the adequacy of the incantation, Mariette declared that it would be necessary to follow it up with a certain formula to be pronounced over the hearts of two pigeons, the one representing the heart of the King, and the other that of La Vallière. Madame de Montespan agreed to the suggestion, and the ceremony was duly performed in the Church of Saint-Severin.

In the meanwhile, the King and his armies had been very successful in Flanders, and, desirous that the Queen and the Court should share in his glory, he gave orders that everything

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should be prepared for their journey to Avesnes, where he would await them. Marie-Thérèse was overjoyed at being thus summoned by the King, and directed the ladies who were to accompany her to make all haste with their preparations. Among these particular ladies, Mesdames de Montausier and de Montespan were included, for the Queen's liking for the young Marquise was increasing every day. To La Vallière, on the contrary, she felt most antipathetic, for she knew her to have been the cause of all the King's indifference to herself—and, taking advantage of Louis' absence, she had it notified to her that she was to retire to her own estates. However, Louise refused to comply with the order; and, although the Queen greatly hoped that she would not proceed to Avesnes, as a matter of fact she did; and, by cleverly taking advantage of short cuts, having started some time after the royal cortège, she rejoined it on the following day, and ventured to ask the Queen for an audience. Marie-Thérèse, in her indignation, refused to receive her; and this was the occasion when Madame de Montespan, who was paying assiduous attention to the Queen, said to her, with that attitude of assumed piety which she knew so well how to adopt when it suited her purpose: "Heaven forbid that I should ever be the King's mistress!—But if such a misfortune ever did befall me, I should certainly not have the effrontery to present myself before the Queen". The scrupulous manner in which Madame de Montespan fulfilled all her religious duties left no doubt in Marie-Thérèse's mind as to the absolute sincerity of the Marquise's remark.

For her part, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whose great love for the King had never once wavered, was thinking of nothing save her own intense desire to meet him again. Having ascertained by chance the exact spot where he was encamped, she ordered her coachman to drive across country, and, at the cost of a thousand jolts, which were most painful and considering her condition most dangerous, she was able to reach the King five minutes before anybody else. Louis, however, did not share his mistress' joy at the meeting. He betrayed only his vexation at her infringement of etiquette, and contented himself with saying coldly: "What!—Before the Queen!"

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Was the witchcraft of the Marquise de Montespan already taking effect?—or was it that the King had been shocked at the fading beauty of Louise, merely because he had retained in his mind the radiant image of the young woman whom the Favourite had had the imprudence to admit to his intimacy? That radiant young woman occupied at Avesnes the room next to that of the King. La Grande Mademoiselle remarks in her *Mémoires* that, on the first day, the door of the King's apartment was guarded by one of the body-guard stationed in the passage; but that, on the second, the soldier had been relegated to the foot of the staircase. In addition to this, Louis XIV began pointedly to absent himself whensoever the Marquise happened to withdraw from the assembled company; and, such disappearances on the part of the King and the Marquise becoming every day more frequent, the courtiers began to cast meaning glances at one another, and to realize that a new power was about to dawn on the Court.

However, on the 14th of July the King quitted the Court to return to the army; and the Queen, followed by the whole Court, retook the Compiègne road, halting at Notre-Dame de Liesse. The people who had assembled there to cheer the royal procession remarked that it contained no less than three Queens. The trouble that had fallen upon Louise de la Vallière was by that time no longer a secret. Melancholy, sore of heart, and depressed by the saddest presentiments, Louise de la Vallière on her return from Flanders withdrew into the seclusion of the Palais Brion, her house within the Palais Royal, there to await the birth of her child.

Madame de Montespan, radiant over her first successes and triumphing at the thought of the altered appearance of her rival, followed the Court to Compiègne. What then was her joy, a few days later, to see the King return! Well she understood that her own beauty was not altogether disconnected with this unexpected appearance, especially when she learned that the King, not wishing to derange his cousin Mademoiselle de Montpensier, who was temporarily occupying the royal apartment, had decided to make shift with the antechamber adjoining the apartments of the Ladies of the Court. Unfortunately, however, for the absolute serenity of the King and Madame de Montespan, many others as well as she

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realized exactly the part that love had played in this lightning visit of the King to Compiègne.

While the Queen was following her husband for the second time into Flanders, she received an anonymous letter drawing her attention to the relations existing between the King and the Marquise de Montespan. Very upset as she was, Marie-Thérèse was nevertheless able to restrain her feelings as she read the letter ; but on the following evening, when she was alone with Mademoiselle de Montpensier, the Marquise de Montespan, and Madame de Montausier, the Queen informed the ladies that she had received the letter, and read them its contents. Not only had someone warned Marie-Thérèse as to the actual intrigue between the two, but the letter gave precise details about it, accusing Madame de Montausier with having been the intermediary who had assisted to facilitate the matter. The Queen concluded by stating that she did not believe a word of the letter, and that she had forwarded it to the King. The communication left the three ladies speechless. Mademoiselle de Montpensier, however, was the first to recover her sang-froid, and she said to the Queen : " Your Majesty has acted wisely ". Madame de Montespan who had by that time regained her self-possession, at once broke forth in a passion of indignant expostulation. She railed against the wickedness of everybody, and, with tears in her eyes, declared that never could she be capable of betraying so kind a mistress as the Queen. Madame de Montausier also vehemently protested against the cruelty of the accusation. The whole scene completely convinced the Queen that the letter had had no other purpose than to deceive her, and to separate her from her most devoted attendants. But the remainder of the Court did not share the Queen's credulity ; and in February, 1668, when Molière's *Amphitryon* was first presented, the author went so far as to make public allusion to the new amour of the King :

" No one could think it any shame,  
To share with Jupiter his name."

Everyone smiled at these lines ; for it was at once understood that Jupiter referred to Louis XIV, and that it was with Monsieur de Montespan that Jupiter was wishing to go shares.

The ascent, however, was even now not so rapid as the

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Marquise would have wished. Louise de la Vallière still retained her position as the King's mistress, and, despite Molière's view of the matter, Monsieur de Montespan was determined to have his wife for himself alone. Whatever the Princesse Palatine or Madame de Caylus may have thought about it, the Marquis did not make all the disturbance about his marital rights merely with the object of extracting from Louis XIV a large sum as compensation. What he was sincerely anxious to effect was to recover his wife for himself—and this is proved by the assistance given him by his uncle the Archbishop of Sens. The latter did not hesitate publicly to stigmatize the case of a married woman who lived with a married man as her lover, as was the case with Madame de Montespan and the King; and the Archbishop dared thus to raise his voice against the royal behaviour when the Court was at Fontainebleau, which was a town under the ministration of the diocese of Sens. To have drawn in this manner the wrath of the Church on the amour of the King would have been a singularly maladroit step to have taken, had the uncle and nephew had the intention of agreeing to the *liaison* after the King had paid down a lump sum to Monsieur de Montespan. It certainly points conclusively to the fact that Monsieur de Montespan created his disturbance at the Court in respect to the King's choice, instead of removing his wife from the Court, simply because he was only too well aware of the character of the Marquise. He knew that her inordinate ambition would render impossible all chance of their ever living together so long as a single ray of hope remained that she might not prove displeasing to the King. He knew also that the violence of her character would drive her to any length, even to crime. That is the reason why he did not act as Madame de Caylus would have had him do, and why, up to the date of his judicial separation with the Marquise (7th of July, 1674), he remained a thorn in the side of the royal lovers.

In the meantime, Madame de Montespan, who desired in spite of every obstacle to reach at once the pinnacle of her triumph, again sought out La Voisin in the first months of 1668. Her success of the preceding year having increased her belief in the efficacy of magic, she did not doubt that a fresh appeal to the Devil would result in the complete realiza-

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tion of her ambitious design. On this occasion the demoniacal ceremonies were performed at the Court itself while it was at Saint-Germain, in the chamber of Madame de Thiangés, elder sister to Madame de Montespan. La Voisin and her colleagues cast spells of the most frenzied description, and aromatic fumigations were made use of, to attract Louis XIV towards Madame de Montespan, and to separate him from Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The events that followed appeared to prove that Madame de Montespan had good reason for placing her confidence in the power of magic. For Louis XIV ceased to trouble at all about Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and sought only to please the Marquise in everything he did. Mesdames d'Armagnac and de Baden, on suspicion of having written the anonymous letter to the Queen, were requested to leave the Court. The Duc de Montausier was appointed Governor to the Dauphin as a reward, so it was thought, for the services rendered by Madame de Montausier in furthering the royal love-affair.

Louis XIV made a point of calling attention—even in the presence of the Marquise—to the fact of his extreme annoyance at the trouble her husband was causing him. But the latter did not desist from enhancing the scandal regarding his wife. One day he would reproach Madame de Montausier in violent terms, on the ground that, had it not been for her complicity, Madame de Montespan would still have been an honest woman ; while on another he went to Saint-Germain, and created a scene with the King himself ; and the same evening he appeared at Mademoiselle de Montpensier's to indulge himself in the pleasure of repeating to her all the abuse he had hurled at the King that morning. His wife also had to endure his scenes—and the Marquis did not trouble to choose his words, in explaining to her his utter contempt for her conduct. Furious but powerless before such floods of abuse and hectoring attitudes, she confined herself to saying afterward : “ I am ashamed to find that he amuses the *canaille*, like my parrot ”. But the King was wearied by so much racket, and, despite his desire to show consideration towards Monsieur de Montespan, he one day had him incarcerated at For-l'Évêque. However, his imprisonment was not of long duration : a promise to retire to his



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"dominions" was sufficient to procure his release. But, in asking him to make this promise, no mention had been made as to his being forbidden to pass through Paris; and he took advantage of the omission to give there a most dramatic exhibition of solemn mockery. Having returned to the Capital, he ordered clothes of the deepest mourning for himself, his children, and his servants. When the clothes were ready, he had his coach draped in black cloth, and, getting into it with his children, departed, followed by his servants, for the Court, to take leave of all his acquaintances. When, at the Court, he was asked for whom he was so deeply in mourning, he replied: "For my wife's honour". This public demonstration was extremely mortifying to Louis XIV, for it had made its impression on Paris, and the King was very sensitive as to what his subjects thought of him. After such a piece of open defiance, it was not astonishing that the King took steps to put Monsieur de Montespan out of harm's way. It is generally supposed that he took advantage of a brawl which occurred at Perpignan between the soldiers of the Marquis' regiment and the Sous-Bailli, to compel the Marquis to flee out of fear into Spain—and he was greatly assisted in the matter by Louvois and Monsieur de Maqueron, Intendant of Le Roussillon. But the Marquis did not take the affair too tragically; for he fled with the wife of a Toulouse Councillor, who was sufficiently attached to him not to resent being carried off. Their exile in Spain, however, was only of short duration; for in the spring of 1678 the presence of Monsieur de Montespan in Paris was again disquieting the King.

While Monsieur de Montespan was thus undergoing the vicissitudes of a husband who declines to meet the wishes of his monarch, his Marquise had gradually mounted to that pinnacle of greatness which had been her dream. On the 3rd of October, 1668, the sorrowing La Vallière had seen her new-born child taken from her without being informed, in accordance with the King's order, as to the fate designed for it; and the following month brought assurance to the Marquise de Montespan that she was now the only woman whom the King delighted to honour. Precautions still had to be taken, of course, on account of the husband; and

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to this effect the suggestion was given that the Marquise, being a particular friend of La Vallière's, was sharing her apartments. But in reality Madame de Montespan was well aware that Louise de la Vallière was nothing more than a screen for herself, and that the King had now ceased to consider the question as to whether his former favourite might be distressed or not. One day when he was crossing the latter's room to go to Madame de Montespan's, Louise, tortured by his cruelty, fixed on the King a look that betrayed the suffering of her heart. The King was carrying a little dog in his arms. "Here is something to keep you company!" he said, handing her the dog—and that was all the attention he paid to her self-evident distress. In March, 1669, the birth of a little girl, which was only to live for three years, was the first pledge of love given by Madame de Montespan to Louis XIV.

From the moment that Madame de Montespan took up the position which she had so ardently desired, she gave free rein to her dazzling personality, and compelled the admiration of all. But to Louise she was heartless, and without pity. Her quick and caustic wit took a delight in torturing the poor woman whom she had envied for so long. Not content with concealing her own intrigue under the cover of La Vallière's proximity—who, poor thing, could have no illusions as to the state of affairs between the new Favourite and the King—she took every opportunity to attack the gentle sufferer and to bring her into ridicule. The King, either through weakness, ingratitude, or fear of displeasing Madame de Montespan, took no steps to stop the martyrdom of his former mistress, till the day came when Louise, whose son had been legitimized at the beginning of 1669 and whose daughter had been made heiress to all she possessed, and who herself day by day became more and more crushed under the sense of all she had lost, suddenly left the Court, during the Shrove-Tuesday ball of the year 1671, and sought refuge for the second time at the Convent of Chaillot.<sup>1</sup>

The King did not go, as on the previous occasion, to bring her back; but whereas, as a consequence of Monsieur de

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *Louise de la Vallière*.

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Montespan and the noble birth of his new mistress, it was still imperative to protect the Marquise's reputation, he sent successively to Chaillot, for that purpose, firstly the Comte de Lauzun, one of his favourites, then the Maréchal de Bellefonds, and lastly Colbert. The Minister alone was successful in persuading Mademoiselle de la Vallière to return to the Court, and he effected it only by depicting to her the great unhappiness of the King at her departure. Victimized by her own love, Louise returned to take up again for a further three years her title of "Maîtresse Déclarée", and the burden of her suffering. The King could not restrain his tears on seeing her again, and Madame de Montespan gave evidence of a joy that was too pronounced to be sincere. In reality, the Marquise de Montespan was for ever haunted by the fear lest Louise de la Vallière might not regain her influence over the King. There exists even a possibility that to such apprehension may be attributed the grave malady which befell Mademoiselle de la Vallière—at the conclusion of which she was permitted by the King to enter the Carmel (21st of April, 1674).

Scarcely had Louise de la Vallière disappeared into her convent than Madame de Montespan, to quote Madame de Sévigné, became "*tonnante et triomphante*". She had already had five children by Louis XIV, among whom were the Duc du Maine, born in March, 1670, and the Comte de Vexin, in January, 1672; and the King, who was extremely proud of her beauty, after having at length had the courage openly to declare her as his mistress, desired that for the future she should always attend his ambassadorial receptions. His aim was to dazzle them by the magnificence and superb beauty of the Lady of his choice. The Marquise came to such receptions in a toilette which Madame de Sévigné has described in her own inimitable manner—"gold upon gold, re-embroidered with gold, and in addition a blurred gold, embroidered over with one gold and mixed with another gold—the whole making a material as divine as can be imagined—a stuff such as the fairies must have secretly fabricated". Everywhere, whether at Fontainebleau, Saint-Germain, or Versailles, the Marquise de Montespan was the leading Lady of the Court, not excepting the Queen. After

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having, as it were, coerced nature to the needs of Versailles, expended millions of money, and employed thousands of men in the completion of the Château, the park, and the work of canalization designed to bring water from Marly to Versailles for the mere pleasure of looking at it, Louis XIV determined that Madame de Montespan should be the Queen of the sumptuous place he had just created. For that reason, Marie-Thérèse was relegated to the second storey of the Château de Versailles, with eleven rooms at her disposal, while Madame de Montespan had a superb suite of twenty rooms on the first floor. The Favourite's train was borne by a Maréchale de France—the Queen's by a simple page. The King devoted all his spare time to the Marquise, often making his Ministers meet him in her rooms for the discussion of affairs of State, so as to be with her longer. He dined nearly every day in his study with Madame de Montespan and the children. All of his children had been legitimized, and at times the King was deeply distressed at the thought that Monsieur de Montespan had the right to claim them.

A single day's entertainment given at Versailles in honour of Madame de Montespan cost one-hundred-and-seventeen-thousand francs. She was the inspiration of all the fêtes, and the source from which all favours and benefactions flowed. La Fontaine praised her, and dedicated to her his twelfth volume of *Fables*. Corneille owed to her the continuance of his pension. Racine and Boileau were proud to read to her aloud. She was the patroness of Quinault and of Lulli. Her generosity was extended to the hospitals and the convents. She founded the Hospital of Les Vieillards, as well as a Convent of Ursulines at Saint-Germain, and an orphanage at Fontainebleau; and she completed the dome of the Church of the Oratorians at Saumur. Everywhere her name resounded and her beauty shone. If, occasionally the Queen was told that the King seemed inclined to take an interest in such and such a lady, Marie-Thérèse would shrug her shoulders with indifference, and reply: "That is Madame de Montespan's business". The poor Queen was so utterly superseded by the Favourite that the latter one day had the coolness to remove all her maids-of-honour whose youth she considered dangerous to herself, and to replace

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them by old "dames du palais". Marie-Thérèse was even obliged on one occasion to entreat Madame de Montespan to obtain forgiveness for one of her ladies ; and, when she had obtained it, she stated that she would never forget her obligation to the Marquise. Whenever the Favourite went out she was escorted by the Body-Guard. When she travelled, her coach was drawn by six horses, followed by a second coach-and-six, carrying six of her maids. Several waggons were loaded up with her luggage, and twelve mounted men brought up the rear. Governors of Provinces, Administrators of Districts, and Delegations from the Towns saluted her and delivered addresses to her *en route*, in the same way as was done in respect to members of the Royal Family.

All this pomp and circumstance coincided with that of the reign, which was now passing through its most triumphant phase. It was the time when the soldiers of Louis XIV were gaining great victories and preparing the way for the glorious treaty of Nimwegen (1678)—the period when Racine, Molière, La Fontaine, Madame de Sévigné, Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and so many others were captivating and enrapturing the Court and the Town, or making them tremble in their shoes—when great portrait-painters like Mignard were depicting women as magnificent as the Marquise de Montespan or as attractive as the Marquise de Sévigné—and when France possessed a Le Nôtre and a Mansard.

So Louis XIV heaped riches and benefits on his superb mistress. Her father, the Duc de Mortemart, was made Governor of Paris ; her brother, the Duc de Vivonne, General of the Galleys, Governor of Champagne and Maréchal de France ; her elder sister, the Marquise de Thianges, received a pension of nine-thousand francs, and a gratuity of six-thousand ; and her younger sister was given the Abbey of Fontevrault. All her children were likewise loaded with honours. The eldest of the boys she had had by the King, the Duc de Maine, was appointed Capitaine des Cent Suisses and Colonel of a Regiment bearing his own name. At the same time he received the Governorship of Languedoc. Her second son, the Comte de Vexin, was appointed Abbé de Saint-Denis *et* de Saint-Germain-des-Prés, before he had learned to read. At the same time Madame de Montespan

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with the full permission of the King, took advantage of the *grande passion* of Mademoiselle de Montpensier for the Comte de Lauzun, and of the complications arising from that unfortunate love-affair <sup>1</sup> to extract from La Grande Mademoiselle for the Duc de Maine the principality of Dombes, the county of Eu, and the Duchy of Aumale. The revenues from the principality of Dombes and the County of Eu amounted to two-hundred-thousand francs per annum. But the finest gift of Louis XIV to Madame de Montespan was her Château de Clagny, joined to the domain of Glatigny, at no great distance from Versailles. At first, the King's intention had been to offer his mistress merely a nice country-house ; but, when the Marquise saw it, she rejected the idea with supreme disdain. " Why, it's only fit for an opera-singer ! " she said contemptuously to the disappointed King. So Louis endeavoured to make of Clagny a little Versailles, and he succeeded admirably in doing this ; for nothing could have been more beautiful than this miniature Versailles, with its gallery two-hundred-and-ten feet long and twenty-five feet wide, decorated with paintings of incidents taken from the *Æneid*. At one end of the gallery was a spacious orangery paved with white marble, and at the other a charming chapel decorated by the most famous artists of the period. The gardens of Clagny extorted cries of admiration from Madame de Sévigné. This castle and garden cost Louis XIV 2,861,728 francs ; and, if to all such expenses be added the enormous sums which Madame de Montespan lost at play, gave away, expended in luxuries, on her servants, children, toilettes, and caprices, it can be readily understood that never did mistress before or since cost her lover what Madame de Montespan cost the King.

But, despite all this opulence, power, and greatness, Madame de Montespan had never been entirely at her ease since the close of 1672. After three years of passionate love, she realized suddenly that the ardour of the King was on the wane. It had become unsettled and intermittent ; and the Marquise, to relieve her consequent anxiety and jealousy and to assure for herself a permanent continuance of the King's love, again paid a visit to La Voisin. The latter

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *La Grande Mademoiselle*.

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declared to her that nothing short of the Black Mass would be capable of exorcizing the evil which she feared. Madame de Montespan heard the statement with a shudder ; but she was prepared to do anything rather than to lose her influence over the King and her position at the Court. So she agreed, though with regret, to Black Masses being celebrated on her behalf, and even to the supreme humiliation of submitting her own body to the terrible ritual of the celebration. A mass of this kind was never celebrated singly. It had to be followed by two others, forming a group of three. The date for the celebrations of these three masses was accordingly fixed for the beginning of 1673, and it was arranged to hold the first in the chapel of the Château de Villebousin, not far from Monthléry. The officiating priest procured by La Voisin was a hideous old man of seventy, named Guibourg, who claimed to be a bastard of the Montmorencys. The people concerned betook themselves with great secrecy to the Château de Villebousin in the middle of the night. Arrived at the chapel, the Marquise undressed, and was stretched, stark naked, on the altar ; and the various mysteries of the ceremonial took place upon her body. A new-born child had been purchased for the purpose, and at the consecration its throat was cut, and its blood was poured into the chalice, to take the place of the sacramental wine. The unfortunate child had been bought for a crown (fifteen francs). Everything was carried through in accordance with the magic ritual, and Madame de Montespan, shaking with shame, cold, and disgust, begged La Voisin to take her place in the two masses that had still to come. Such an exchange was permissible, since Madame de Montespan had personally participated in the first mass ; so, on payment of a large sum to La Voisin, she was thus enabled to attend as a simple spectator at Saint-Denis for the second Black Mass, and in Paris for the third. Once again the power of magic appeared to produce the desired effect, for, towards the time of the celebration of the last Black Mass, Louis XIV gave evidence of a reawakened interest in Madame de Montespan's attractions, and redoubled his attentions.

However, in this same year, 1673, the Marquise was to come into conflict with the sweet and modest woman, who

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was one day to undermine the whole of her power—Madame Scarron, *née* Françoise d'Aubigné. Born in the Prison of Niort, and brought up out of charity by relations, one of whom only showed her the least kindness, Françoise d'Aubigné had married the crippled poet Scarron, out of pity for herself and compassion for him. The hardships of life had developed what was naturally a strong and versatile character to such effect that, when Scarron died leaving her a widow at the early age of twenty-five, all their numerous friends contended with one another to have her to stay with them. It was at the house of one of such friends, Madame d'Haudicourt, that Madame de Montespan first met her, and had the preliminary discussion which ultimately resulted in Madame Scarron becoming the guardian of the children of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan. The Favourite wanted the King to make acquaintance with the guardian, and to get to like her; and it was in this way that Madame Scarron entered the Court, and made herself soon indispensable. Louis XIV had never had before so perfect and well-informed a reader and he had never met anyone who could talk so modestly and yet so interestingly, a woman so restful and so capable of cheering the heart and mind, a counsellor so wise and so reverent in spirit. Though genuinely praising Madame de Montespan, she very quickly contrived to awaken the King's conscience on the matter of his *liaison* with the Favourite so that, when Bourdaloue ventured directly to reproach him as to his conduct, Louis XIV already directed into the path of contrition by Madame Scarron, yielded to the remonstrances of the Church, and dismissed the Favourite (Christmas, 1675).

Her exile, however, was only temporary: despite the urgent entreaties of Bossuet, Madame de Montespan returned to the King in July, 1676. Her triumph was even greater and more complete than it had been before; but the blow which had been struck at her power had nevertheless shaken it. The Favourite herself had no fears on that score. She fully believed that magic had once again come to her aid and restored to her her greatness. During the King's late fit of piety she had, in fact, gone yet again to La Voisin, and had procured from the sorceress some love-powders for



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administration to the King. These powders, the composition of which is now known, were a horrible compound of cantharides, powdered-dust of desiccated moles, and the blood of bats, all mixed together in an unmentionable substance. They had been placed under the chalice, during a Black Mass. The Marquise de Montespan, thanks to the connivance of certain of the servants, had succeeded in getting the King to take the powders. Louis XIV never knew of the horrible admixture he had taken ; but, at the time he was being thus dosed, his doctors were solicitous as to the state of his health, and diagnosed him to be suffering from indigestion.

While Madame de Montespan had in this way been relying on magic to effect her return to the Court, the King had testified to his cordial relations with Madame Scarron by giving her the wherewithal to purchase the domain of Maintenon, with the title of Marquise de Maintenon. The time, in fact, was not far off when Madame de Sévigné would be in the position to write : " Madame de Maintenon grows in favour, day by day ".

However, the King was again in the toils of Madame de Montespan. June, 1677, saw the birth of Mademoiselle de Blois,<sup>1</sup> and the following year the Comte de Toulouse. But Louis XIV was no longer faithful to the Marquise de Montespan, as he had been in the past. His affection for her was variable—her violent temper, which now she took no trouble to restrain, alienating and upsetting him. The King, in fact, was again on amatory adventure, halting occasionally *en route*.

This was the period of his peregrinatory dalliance from Anne de Rohan, Princesse de Soubise, to Madame de Louvigny, and from Mademoiselle de Rochefort Theobon to Madame de Ludres. At the first sign of this fresh danger, Madame de Montespan rushed to La Voisin, and the Black Masses again began. They, however, were powerless to prevent Louis XIV from falling in love with the bewitching Mademoiselle de Fontanges, who was fair and frail, and unfortunately equally foolish. La Fontanges presented a son to the King in January,

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the two Mesdemoiselles de Blois, see Note at the end of this volume.

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1680 ; but the child did not live, and the mother died from the sequence of a double malady contracted in respect to her confinement (28th of June, 1681).

However, it was the favoured position of this bewitching Duchesse de Fontanges that caused the Marquise de Montespan in concert with the sorcerers to conceive a crime which, had it but been successful, would have resulted in nothing short of the death of the woman and of the King himself. If the Marquise at that moment had only been gifted with the faculty of clairvoyance, she would have discerned that the great danger for her lay not in Mademoiselle de Fontanges but in Madame de Maintenon, to whom she herself had once angrily exclaimed : " The King has three Mistresses—you, in affection ; this girl (Fontanges) in actuality ; and myself in name".

About the same time a terrible occurrence precipitated the course of events, and transformed the life of the Court. On the 12th of March, La Voisin was arrested as she was leaving mass, which she had just attended at the Church of Bonne-Nouvelle. Further arrests soon followed in all directions, and the *Chambre Ardente* was constituted to try all crimes of sorcery and poisoning. Both sorcerers and alchemists endeavoured—with the exception of La Voisin—to avoid trial by disclosing to justice the names of their most distinguished clients, their hope being that all procedure would be suppressed in consideration of such personages. In this hope La Voisin's friends brought forward in their evidence the name of Madame de Montespan, who had had recourse to them so often. When Louis XIV had acquired the absolute certainty that these people were telling nothing but the truth, he was overwhelmed with horror and the knowledge of the shameful manner in which he had been deceived. Never could he have imagined the mother of his seven children to have been capable of crimes of so unspeakable a nature. He did not intend, however, that she should be brought to trial. He suppressed every item in the *dossier* which accused her. But he never again manifested to her one particle of affection. The interview in August, 1680, which the Marquise's great friend Louvois contrived to arrange between herself and Louis XIV, resulted only in

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confirming the King in the opinion that he had had good reason to suppress the accusatory documents against her. And this interview also confirmed him in another opinion, namely that the woman before him had always been actuated by ambition and never by love—the woman, who on that day, in her fury against the King, had gratuitously insulted him by reviling him for the objectionable nature of his breath.

Notwithstanding this, Madame de Montespan remained at the Court till the 15th of March, 1691, supported always by the hope that the King would pardon her. But he never did. She became at last a source of annoyance to the whole entourage of Louis XIV, till finally her son, the Duc de Maine—to whom she had always been very kind, but who was entirely under the influence of Madame de Maintenon—himself urged her to withdraw from the Court. On leaving the Court, the Marquise received a pension of one-hundred-thousand livres a month, and continued to maintain the luxury and magnificence of her former state. Gradually, however, she was drawn back into the religion which she had practised so strictly in her early days, and she finally died the death of a good Christian. In May, 1796, a year before her death, Madame de Montespan had a very clearly defined presentiment that she had only a year to live. She died on the 27th of May, 1707, at Bourbon-les-Bains, after having lived to see the former guardian of her children held in greater honour at Court than ever she had been herself—to know that she was a power there, esteemed and courted—and to be told that she was addressed, in private by her confessor and by a few other people, as “Your Majesty”.

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### LA VOISIN AND HER ASSOCIATES

[1676-1682]

The trial of the Marquise de Brinvilliers had left a grave sense of uneasiness in the public mind. Everyone had hoped that the condemned woman, previous to her death, would have made sensational revelations. However, although she had appeared to be sincere in her last hours, she had disclosed nothing that was not already known; and this dearth of anticipated disclosure, far from assuaging the public excitement, merely augmented it. Louis XIV, the Judges, Paris, and in fact everyone, had a very definite impression that Exili, Sainte-Croix, the Marquise de Brinvilliers, and their wretched underlings were not alone in their crimes, isolated from the whole community. Their methods had been too assured, the carrying out of their crimes too astute and well managed, to admit of the suggestion that they were not affiliated, directly or indirectly, to a complete criminal organization such as facilitated preliminaries, made a study of the best means of causing the effects of crime to simulate an appearance of illness, and, in short, constituted a veritable school for the furtherance of criminal projects. The Marquise and her lover might not have personally belonged to such an organization, but they had certainly been in touch with its activities. Such belief was substantiated when the Jesuits of the Rue Saint-Antoine, in Paris, gave information to the Lieutenant Général de Police of a mysterious letter that their sacristan had found in a confessional when sweeping the church. This anonymous letter, comprising no less than three pages, warned the Fathers that many poisonings had been perpetrated both in Paris and the provinces, and that, at the present moment, the highest personages in the land, including even the King and the Dauphin, had been marked down by the gang for a similar fate.

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La Reynie, the Lieutenant de Police, was greatly upset on receipt of this letter. He was a man of physical energy and remarkable courage, endowed with perspicacity and great tenacity of purpose, solicitous in the cause of justice, and so loyal to the King that he became greatly distressed at anything that suggested imperfection in the working of the Executive—and he now determined to discover what truth there was in the letter sent to him by the Jesuit Fathers, and to hunt down the criminals if they actually existed. His efforts, guided by his exceptional intelligence, resulted in his discovering at Lyons a veritable gang of alchemists, coiners, and magicians, who in La Reynie's opinion, though he still had no proof, would probably be ready to take up poisoning, were it only made worth their while to do so. The head of this gang, Louis de Vanens and his mistress, Finette, were arrested at Lyons on the 5th of December, 1677. Louis de Vanens was, as a matter of fact, a scion of the nobility—a retired Captain of the Gallies, or at any rate posing as such, and in touch with the best society. Among his friends he counted the Marquise de Montespan and other great ladies, both French and foreign. Indeed, he was a constant traveller, and had numerous acquaintances in the Netherlands, Italy, Savoy, and Luxembourg, as well as in France. At the time of his arrest he was a smart young man of about thirty, of distinguished appearance, a good talker, very much favoured by the ladies, whom he knew how to make up to and to flatter, and, generally speaking, a boon companion. He was brought to trial, necessarily, before the Parliament of Lyons—but the matter soon induced unexpected developments. Not only had Vanens and his crew sold to the Paris Mint ingots of spurious metal cast by themselves, boasted of having discovered the philosopher's stone, and had all kinds of monstrous relations with the Devil; but, through the agency of a dog, the Parliament of Lyons had unearthed the fact that this particular gang had undoubtedly been connected with the mysterious death of the Duc de Savoie, which occurred in 1675. The revelations made by Vanens on this subject at once gave a new aspect to the trial. From the fact of a reigning Sovereign having fallen victim to their activities, the matter assumed

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such importance that Louis XIV judged it prudent to hand the whole case over to La Reynie himself ; and a Decree in Council was issued to that effect, dated the 13th of January, 1678.

La Reynie conducted the inquiry with all the energy and keenness of intelligence such as the occasion demanded. By the 15th of May, 1678, he was sufficiently acquainted with the organization of the Vanens gang to enable him to arrest the principal accomplices of the criminal, whom he had kept imprisoned for the past five months. Such accomplices were Bachimont, the man who had been charged with selling to the Mint the ingots cast by the gang of coiners—Sainte-Colombe, who had supplied the trade with quantities of spurious diamonds, rubies, and emeralds taken from his crucibles—Chasteuil, who, when a monk, had seduced a young girl of good family, and had strangled her to avoid the scandal when he discovered she was about to become a mother—and a lot of subordinate rascals, also, who had profited by the satanic practices of the gang and their alchemistic associates, and by the manufacture of imitation precious stones. All these people, thus accused, without meaning to compromise one another, nevertheless made such admissions as enabled La Reynie to extend his researches. In a short time the Lieutenant Général de Police arrived at the conclusion that the Vanens organization was only a single branch of a vast criminal society ramifying all over France, whose object was—no matter how infamous were the means employed—to attack the rich and the great, so as to procure for themselves the enjoyments of life, and even its distinctions should such an opportunity occur. It became imperative, therefore, to watch and examine minutely every corner of France, the large towns in particular—and necessarily Paris was the one most to be feared. It contained a large number of suspects, who increased year by year thanks to the toleration of the police—people, calling themselves magicians, soothsayers, or sorcerers, and held in high favour by the public. They claimed, in fact, to be able to predict the future, to relieve and even to cure all maladies, to disclose secrets of all sorts and of the greatest advantage, and to give unlimited assistance in all situations of difficulty. The

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public had absolute faith in them, and even many of the most enlightened minds of the period, Bossuet for instance, had no doubt as to their powers. La Bruyère has written in regard to the magicians: "The theory advanced in explanation of such phenomena is not easily understood, its foundations being vague, uncertain, and approaching to the visionary. But there do exist perplexing occurrences, testified to by seriously minded men, who have personally witnessed them or have been informed by them by men of similar mental calibre to themselves. And so, as with all things extraordinary and outside the range of our common experience, it finds adherents among the credulous and the intelligent".<sup>1</sup>

The practice of sorcery, therefore, had a very strong hold on the France of the seventeenth century, many of the wisest men being convinced that it was a power that could not be ignored. And it was the existence of such a belief that enabled magicians, sorcerers, and soothsayers, of both sexes, once they had made their name, to prosper, and in certain cases to become so wealthy as to allow them to keep open house, and to vie even with the nobility in the sumptuousness of their entertainments; and it was to be through one of such entertainments that La Reynie was to unearth what he had been suspecting ever since he took charge of the Vanens case.

It was towards the end of the year 1678, and the magicians and soothsayers were celebrating the coming of the new year by a series of dinner parties. Such entertainments were not confined to the ministry of the occult powers alone, but invitations were extended to men of the outer world; and so it was that, at a famous dinner-party given in the last days of December by La Vigoureux, one of the most notorious soothsayers, the Paris bar was represented in the person of Maître Perrin. The food was dainty, and the wine generous; everyone eating and drinking to their heart's content. In fact, under the heady influence of the wine, tongues were beginning to wag, and a great stout soothsayer, Marie Bosse, by name, who, since the death of her husband, a small wine merchant, had set up the establishment of a person of means, suddenly called out with the gaiety of a woman who realized

<sup>1</sup> La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, ch. iv.

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that she was making a success of life : " Three more poisonings—and my fortune is made ! " The attentive ear of Maître Perrin did not lose a single syllable of this extraordinary confidence ; and the next day the wife of an archer was sent to the soothsayer to make complaints as to her husband's attitude ; and so skilfully did this woman gain the confidence of the Devil's confederate that the latter, after receiving a considerable sum of money, gave to her some powders certified to relieve her from all such worries.

On the following 4th of January (1679) La Reynie arrested Marie Bosse, her daughter Manon, her two sons François and Guillaume, and the hostess of the unlucky dinner, La Vigoureux herself.

As a consequence of this, the Lieutenant de Police was now certain that his original deductions were not at fault : though he surmised that up to date he had laid hands only on poisoners of secondary importance. They were, however, submitted to the severest cross-examination ; and in the first sitting, in the same way as some of the rascals of the Vanens gang had done, they let drop scared and evasive references to a certain mysterious and highly dangerous packet that was destined for the King. Such references were mixed up with admissions of sorcery, incantations, the burning of faggots, and other practices, all more or less of a disturbing character. The whole kingdom was undoubtedly permeated with daring and diabolical criminals, and La Reynie had now sufficient information to justify him in arresting the most noted sorcerer in Paris, if not the greatest in France—La Voisin. Such arrest was carried out on the 12th of March, 1679, at least two of the minor criminals having already been executed in the preceding month.

No event could have produced greater disturbance and fright in the world of magic and sorcery than the arrest of La Voisin. *Née* Catherine Deshayes, she had when quite young attracted attention by her vivacity and intelligence, and also by that remarkable faculty, possessed by so many Paris children, of expressing with individuality, clearly, and picturesquely, exactly what they think and see. As she grew up, Catherine also gave evidence of the possession of a



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remarkable gift for reading character and divining the most secret thoughts by the study of the faces of those she met—a gift whereby she would have been able to have earned a living. But she preferred to marry at the age of eighteen a small haberdasher with a shop on the Pont de Sainte-Marie in Paris, named Monvoisin. He was a widower with a daughter, Marguerite, by a former marriage, and was a poor man of business, without much intelligence. Not only did his affairs refuse to prosper, but a few years after his marriage he had managed to lose all he had.

And then the busy, clever, and ambitious woman recalled the gift she possessed of reading character, with a full realization of the profit she might make by it, especially if, in addition to her own natural gifts, she joined forces with the Devil. She was firmly convinced of the fact that the Prince of Darkness had both the power and the desire to intervene in the daily life of anyone who chose to sell him his soul. Determined to make money in this way, the woman Monvoisin sold herself to the Devil without misgiving, preferring wealth in this world to salvation hereafter. Her success in the practice of magic circulated in all directions. It soon became the fashion to visit her from curiosity, or to consult her in the hope of being enabled to gratify unlawful desires or horrible vices. Her clientèle became so numerous, and her remuneration so large, that, in a few months after beginning the business, she was in a position to settle in Villeneuve-sur-Gravois, a little way from Saint-Denis, in a delightful country house, luxuriously furnished and surrounded by a charming garden.

Catherine Monvoisin at that time was not more than twenty-three or twenty-four. She was an attractive little person with her quick and piercing glance, plump little figure, and bright and pleasant manner. Her one aim was to extract from existence all the pleasure it could give her, and her captivating and infectious laughter made her the life and soul of every entertainment, whether given by herself or by others. She was always now known as "La Voisin", and the whole fraternity of sorcerers and magicians were proud to call her their friend. High society also desired to stand in her good graces, so as to profit from her powers.

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The sorceress took an intense and mischievous pleasure in making the noblest and best known men and women wait for hours in her antechamber. When she did finally receive them, she was always to be found richly and ostentatiously dressed, wearing a sea-green velvet robe ornamented with French point-lace of a value of some eighty-thousand francs. Suspended from her shoulders was a mantle of crimson velvet embroidered with two-hundred-and-five eagles of fine gold. Her shoes, woven from silver thread, were also embroidered with eagles of fine gold. Wearing this costume, La Voisin would move about in a slow and majestic manner, giving her audiences with a dignified condescension. In the evening she would receive her friends at a sumptuous board, enriched with the finest wines of all descriptions, while a band of expert violinists added their strains to the attractions of the table. There were to be found the intimate associates of the sorceress, and her lovers in particular, André Guillaume, the executioner, elbowing the Vicomte de Cousserans and the Comte de Labatie, both of whom were also favoured with her intimacies, as well as Fauchet, the architect, and the alchemist Latour, the most tyrannical of them all. At these nocturnal gatherings the sorceress dropped the attitude of dignity appertaining to her professional interviews of the day, and often betrayed the intrinsic depravity of her corrupt nature in its most repelling form. As an example of this, she could have been seen one evening furiously quarrelling with Marie Bosse, and clinching her argument by seizing the widow violently by the hair, to prove which was the better woman of the two. And at other times, Latour would have to slap his mistress in front of her guests, perchance because she was drunk, a very ordinary experience of hers, or because she was saying things that annoyed him. But, despite such defects, La Voisin remained none the less the social leader of the sorcerers, and when the Lieutenant de Police had her under arrest, he felt justified in thinking that he held the key to all the *dramas mystérieux* which the reign of Louis XIV had seen, and to the dangers which seemed to threaten the King.

However, the twentieth century, which can judge "L'Affaire des Poisons" from a distance—which has had

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the advantage of the information contained in the manuscript written by Maître Brunet, with the assistance of extracts taken from the documents in the possession of La Reynie's heirs (such documents being now preserved in the library of the Corps Législatif)—which is acquainted with the contents of the Arsenal documents and those of the Bastille, and which has been in a position to study the numerous works written on the subject of the sorcerers and poisoners of the seventeenth century—the twentieth century has every right to refuse to accord to La Voisin the importance that was given to her by her contemporaries. It is not to be doubted but that La Voisin was the most notable sorceress of the seventeenth century, or that she did not gain less than ten-thousand francs per annum, which nowadays would be worth ten times as much, or again that she was consulted by the very highest nobility of France, and that her audacities often had their disquieting reactions on the Court. But, however great may have been her reputation and the estimation in which her consultations were held, however dazzling may have been her luxury and daring her conduct, she was nevertheless only a subordinate in the vast corporation of malefactors that overran France with its ramifications and lived on the naïveté and vices of those it exploited.

In taking a bird's-eye view of these malefactors, it is easy to perceive to-day that their organization, which probably ramified throughout the majority of the provinces, consisted of three degrees—the highest of which was composed of the real Leaders of the movement. These were all intelligent and cultivated men, who were acquainted with chemistry, continuing to study it all their lives, and who had a knowledge of medicine, surgery, physics, and of all the practical sciences. People of that calibre had nothing to do with magic, beyond making use of it in the same way as a bird-catcher makes use of a mirror, in order to entrap the larks. The actual corner-stones of the corporation, they provided the poisons and were the invisible but supreme counsellors, without whom the sorcerers and soothsayers would have had no power. Among them were—Exili, in the days of La Brinvilliers—Vanens, who, having lived in Paris both with Laforêt and Chaplain, two well-known

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sorceresses, long enough to gain their confidence, entered through their agency into relations with that underworld of the Capital to which they belonged, and so paved the way for his successful travels as a dealer in poison. On such tours he furnished the stuff to La Beauregard, La Laforêt, La Chapelain, at one time to La Voisin, and to many others. Then there was Chastanel, who dealt with the clientèle in Provence—Bachimont, who assisted Vanens in his multiple undertakings—Galet, with headquarters at Caen, who operated more particularly in Normandy, and to whom La Voisin had recourse in matters of exceptional delicacy and gravity. And there were a crowd of well-educated young men, often of good family, whose thirst for pleasure, love of money, and attraction to vice had destroyed all scruples, honesty, and respect both for themselves and for others. Their only idea was to make as much money as possible, and in the quickest possible manner. Both experience and intelligence had taught them, after sounding the depths of human depravity, that the easiest way to reach their goal was to pander to vice, wheresoever they might meet it. And it was to that purpose that they became coiners, producers of poisons, and dealers in drugs—their scientific training, connections, and knowledge of the world enabling them to perform the triple function, the perpetration of which lay outside the scope of the less-educated. And therein lies the explanation why La Voisin, in spite of her luxury, wealth, and celebrity, was merely a subordinate in that vast criminal organization. For all her important enterprises she was entirely dependent on the *intelligentsia* of the confraternity; for if, as has been alleged, La Voisin had been capable of manufacturing her own poisons, surely she would never have bought them elsewhere on occasions demanding exceptional secrecy of treatment.

The *intelligentsia*, certainly, in their turn were dependent on those who attracted the clientèle, namely all such as belonged to the realm of magic—or, in other words, those who composed the second degree of the organization. Such people commanded all the devices whereby to attract the public—enigmatic language, mysterious procedures, a disturbing or imposing appearance, complicated rites, and

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frightful ceremonies. It was also believed that they were in constant and intimate communication with the Devil ; and the general atmosphere was such as still further to excite imaginations already affected by the mysticism of the times. Everyone, even in the highest spheres of society, was prepared to believe and to act in accordance with what sorcerers and soothsayers told them, as opportunity offered. On the other hand, the sorcerers themselves, with one or two exceptions, being thoroughly convinced that the Devil really conferred on them supernatural powers, became greatly daring, and were ready to embark on any crime. Thus the credulity of the public and the hardihood of the magician crowd together combined to complete a system of crime that was as thorough as it was formidable.

The third degree of this system was to be found in the mass of people of all ranks, increasing day by day, who crowded to hear what the magicians had to tell them ; and it was the credulity and money of this crowd on which the corporation lived and grew rich.

The criminal organization of the seventeenth century can be more easily understood if one considers what is happening nowadays in the traffic in cocaine and other drugs. International travellers, for money received, furnish large supplies of the pernicious stuff to affiliated agents in every country, and the latter, as did the magicians of the past, make it their speciality to create a clientèle of purchasers. The actual Devil is no longer a shareholder ; but his sinister personality has been replaced either by the dance-fiend, who in a similar way exercises an evil influence over the *habitués* of the night clubs, or by the bewitchments of some beauty-shop, or by the attractive delights of the milliner's private-room for the trying-on of new confections, or even by the simple pleasures of the modern tea-room. Just in the same way as the Vanens and Galets of the past ran great risks and gained great sums, so do the Travelling Gentlemen of the present day. The affiliated agents get their percentage of the profits, and, like the magicians of the seventeenth century, are in no way disturbed by any misfortunes resulting from their own complicity in the matter. And, finally, as with the powders distributed by the magician and sorcerers, so in the same

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way do the poisons of the present day bring dishonour, despair, and death in their train.

The satisfaction and sense of expectation which the Lieutenant de Police had experienced on the arrest of La Voisin were fully shared by the Parliament of Paris. Everyone was hoping great things from the sorceress' revelations. But La Voisin's first attitude was to take a pride in her own profession. "Since the age of nine", she said, "I have studied necromancy and physiognomy. At first the missionaries<sup>1</sup> used to harass me on the subject; but, being given an opportunity to explain the nature of my art to Nos Seigneurs les grands vicaires during the diocesan vacation, and also to Messieurs les docteurs de Sorbonne, I have not been worried since". She used every endeavour to convince her judges that she had never utilized her profession for the purpose of harming anyone. She had merely sold love-powders, drawn horoscopes, and advised remedies, with a clear conscience. However, gradually La Voisin was forced to admit that all she had done had not been altogether harmless—that painful and shocking disorders, even death itself, had resulted from the effects of powders she had prescribed—that she had assisted in the procuring of abortions—that she had sold poisons and diamond-powder—in fact, she even gave the names of several persons who had purchased it. And, finally, she gave the names of the sacrilegious priests who had conducted Black Masses for her clients of both sexes, and who had assisted her in the diabolical ceremonies designed with the purpose of obtaining from the Devil the particular benefits desired. Such priests were Mariette, Guibourg, and Gilles Davot. She also named Lesage, possibly the most contemptible of all the sorcerers' acolytes, for he was as great a liar as he was covetous and cowardly, deceiving everyone in turn, and having no belief whatsoever in the magic from which he derived his power.

The first intimations on the part of La Voisin led to the arrest of the sacrilegious priests, and to two other famous sorceresses—La Trianon and La Dodée; and the chatter of

<sup>1</sup> Referring to the Brothers of the Religious Order founded by Saint-Vincent de Paul a few years before, for the purpose of keeping watch on the morals of the subjects of Louis XIV.

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these two speedily brought a further large catch into the net. By this move, the Lieutenant de Police in a short time had under his thumb nearly every important person in the wizard-world—La Charon, who shared the titled clientèle with La Voisin—La Jacob—La Picquet—the woman Le Père, La Voisin's customary assistant—Marguerite Monvoisin—and many others. All these new arrivals appeared to be particularly anxious to avoid any charge of complicity in a series of special crimes concerning which they took great pains to give the impression they knew nothing. The secret cross-examinations brought to light that such crimes had reference to the King, and that all the wretched prisoners were trembling at the thought of being accused of *lèse-majesté*. La Voisin continued to remain absolutely silent on the subject, and it was then that the Parliament of Paris, as had happened with the Parliament of Lyons at the end of 1677, became afraid to take further responsibility. The matter of the disturbing and ominous mystery overhanging the trial was submitted to the King. The judges were worried also on the question of satanic practices. They themselves believed in the efficacy of such practices, and for that very reason were most anxious that the public should remain in ignorance of them. La Reynie discussed the matter with the King, and on the 7th of April, 1679, Louis XIV by letters patent removed the jurisdiction of the "Affaire des Poisons et des Sorciers" from the Court of Justice and confided it to a Special Commission which was to hold its session in the Royal Chamber of the Arsenal. The King, more than anyone, was anxious that the fact should not become public that his royal person had been threatened by criminals, and that magic had been directed against him.

The new Judicial Commission constituted by the King took the name of "Chambre Ardente"—and for the reason that, in the past, extraordinary tribunals constituted for the purpose of dealing with great crimes, and especially such as were committed against the King or against religion, sat in a hall draped in black, with all its windows closed and curtained and lighted only by torches and flambeaux—the idea being that daylight should not be permitted even to come into contact with the investigation of such truly horrible crimes.

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However, this particular Commission of 1679 held its session in daylight, and so it was only by analogy that it received its name, as a consequence of the sacrileges and crimes of *lèse-majesté* of which the accused were thought to be guilty being exactly the class of offence which had been especially dealt with by the original Chambres Ardentes.

The Commission entered upon its functions on the 10th of April, 1679, and decided to deal only with the most notorious criminals, hoping thereby to acquire full information as to all that affected the King, the great poison-cases of the kingdom, and the crimes of sacrilege—and it sat continuously for ten months in great secrecy. In December, 1679, the Court was at Saint-Germain, and on the 22nd of the month Louis XIV summoned to his presence Monsieur de La Reynie, Messieurs Boucherat and Besons, and Monsieur le Procureur du Roi, Robert, respectively President and Members of the Commission at the Arsenal. The King sent for them to give them the authoritative instruction that they were "to see that justice was done, without regard to person, condition, or sex". Such order was merely a prelude to the judicial bolt out of the blue that was to startle Paris on the 23rd of the following month (1680).

On that particular day three-hundred-and-sixty-seven persons, including one-hundred-and-thirty-eight women, were swept up by a royal warrant authorizing their arrest. Among them were several of the most important personages of the kingdom—a Maréchal de France, Counts, Duchesses, Marquises, and a Princess occupying one of the highest positions in France. Louis XIV was determined that justice should be done, and that his judges should not be intimidated by the high rank of the accused. The kingdom had to be purged of a horde of paid poisoners, and a vicious, intriguing, disloyal nobility had to be punished. On the 24th of February, 1680, a month after these sweeping arrests, Louis XIV added to the labours of the Chambre Ardenle the duty of examining all offences in respect to witchcraft, impiety, profanation, and counterfeit coining. Before making this decision public, the King had sent for La Reynie and had said to him: "It is no longer merely a question of definite acts of poisoning—we shall now have to make war on another crime". By these last words



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Louis XIV was indicating the ecclesiastical crime of sorcery, which his education and beliefs had made peculiarly odious to him.<sup>1</sup>

Since the decree of the 23rd of January, the *Chambre Ardente* had become very active. La Voisin had at last broken her silence, although she was still most reticent ; and it was obvious that there were names and facts known to her which she had not yet disclosed. As a matter of fact, her original hope had been that she might only have to admit to names of little importance. Then, later on, she admitted to having had as clients such persons as the Comtesse de Roure and Madame de Polignac, who had begged her to utilize her magic powers in procuring for them the favour of the King. On the 17th of February she named the Comtesse de Soissons as having visited her accompanied by Maréchale de la Ferté and Mademoiselle de Fouilloux. The sorceress asserted that, after having examined the Countess' hand, she had told her that at one time she had been loved by a great Prince, and that, having said so, the Countess had insisted on knowing whether the love in question was likely to revive, adding how important it was that it should. La Voisin concluded her statement by saying that she had never seen the Countess since, "nor ever heard of her".<sup>2</sup> She also accused the Duchesse de Bouillon, younger sister of the Comtesse de Soissons, of having come to ask her for some "*poudres de succession*", for the removal of her husband.<sup>3</sup> On the 19th of February La Voisin named, among other people, Racine, who, she said, was responsible for the death of his mistress, Mademoiselle du Parc. In making such accusation, Catherine Voisin probably thought she was telling the truth ; but neither the *Chambre Ardente*, nor posterity, have accepted her point of view.

Racine loved Mademoiselle du Parc more deeply than any other woman who entered into his life. If he kept La Voisin and her associates away from Mademoiselle du Parc when she was ill, it was solely because the poet was afraid that such persons might furnish his mistress with the means of avoiding

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Chambre Ardente* for the year 1679 (Bibliothèque du Corps Législatif).

<sup>2</sup> See the chapter on *Olympe Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons*.

<sup>3</sup> See the chapter on *Marie-Anne Mancini, Duchesse de Bouillon*.

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an approaching maternity, which the widowhood of the actress rendered embarrassing. It is probable, besides, that the watchful care of Racine failed to avert the disaster which he was dreading, and that Mademoiselle du Parc died as a consequence of the evil advice given her by unscrupulous people.

Among the arrests of the 23rd of January, 1680, none had struck the imagination more vividly than that of Henri-François de Bouteville-Montmorency,<sup>1</sup> who had become Duc de Luxembourg as a consequence of his marriage. He had married the heiress of the Duchy of Luxembourg, and had been made a Maréchal de France upon the death of Turenne. In virtue of his courage and rapidity of decision on the battlefield, he had been compared to Condé, his first cousin, whose aide-de-camp he had been for some time past. As brave and impetuous as Condé, Luxembourg, hearing one day that the enemy had called him "that hunchback" exclaimed in angry amazement: "How can they know I'm a hunchback! They have certainly never seen me from behind!" Nevertheless, that very man was now in the Bastille. According to the statement of his friends, he was there simply because Louvois, the Minister, who took the most active part in the "Affaire des Poisons", hated him. Voltaire, who studied his case in the following century decided that "His proud replies were not those of a guilty man". However, if we are to believe that very wide-awake and charming woman, Madame de Sévigné, who grasped with such sound commonsense everything that happened in her time, bringing to bear on it the picturesque view of her own inimitable personality, the Maréchal de Luxembourg's pride was not so obviously apparent during the course of his trial. What the Marquise wrote on the 31st of January, 1680, was to the following effect: "Monsieur de Luxembourg has eaten nothing for two days—he asked to see several Jesuits—it was refused—he asked for the *Lives of the Saints*—it was given him—he is quite nonplussed, as you see, as to what Saint to pray to . . . It looks as though it would have been wiser on his part to have given his innocence a little country air". Did Madame de Sévigné believe in his innocence—or, rather, did she think that flight

<sup>1</sup> *Archives de la Bastille*, tome vi, examined by François Ravaisson.

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alone could save the Maréchal ? In this same letter she adds : " Monsieur de Luxembourg has entirely collapsed. He is not a man—he is too contemptible. He is not even a woman—he is too silly. If that's all they can take to the Bastille, it would have been better to have let him escape ". Evidently the accusation brought against the Maréchal was sufficient to make him cut a sorry figure, even if at the time he was altogether blameless. He was charged with having sought the death of his own wife, and that of the Maréchal de Créqui ; with having conspired against the King's authority, and possibly against his life ; and with having attempted to obtain a large sum of money through the craft of the coiner, Montemaïor. If this last charge had any truth in it, it can be urged that such money was indispensable for the maintenance of his armies. In addition to Montemaïor, the sorry ministrants to his alleged crimes would have been the sorcerers and sorceresses with their diabolical practices ; and, however terrible might have been such accusations, it is somewhat difficult to credit that the deplorable condition of the Maréchal was due solely to his horror of such unspeakable things. Despite his efforts to exculpate himself, the Duc de Luxembourg was forced to admit that he had had relations with Lesage, and that the man had " got out of him a letter, *containing a lot of rubbish, which he now wants to make out to be very important* ". It is difficult to imagine so exalted a personage as a Maréchal de France amusing himself by formulating criminal requests in writing merely for the purpose of seeing what a sorcerer would do with them. On the other hand, if we recall the attitude of Sainte-Croix in respect to the Marquise de Brinvilliers, we can see that it was the custom among this particular class to hold in their possession some sort of evidence to prove that the actual perpetrator had acted under orders. The Duke was unable to sustain his denial that he had had relations with Montemaïor. His steward Bonnard, who had assisted him in all his dealings with the sorcerers and coiners, was condemned to do penance " with the cord round his neck ", and to the galleys for life. However, on the 14th of May, 1680, the Duc de Luxembourg was found " not guilty " on all the charges brought against him. He had been in prison, either in the Bastille or the Fortress of Vincennes,

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for three months and twenty-two days. Although pronounced innocent, he was ordered by the King to leave Paris for a year—and when he returned to the Court at the conclusion of his exile, it was in a subordinate position, and tantamount to semi-disgrace. For nine years, in fact, he had no higher appointment than that of Captain of the Body Guard—and it was only the harsh exigencies of the war of the League of Augsburg, that brought him back into favour in 1690. In the Commander of the army in Flanders, there was nothing remotely reminiscent of the man, who at one time had been mixed up with La Voisin and Lesage. More successful than ever on the field of battle he defeated the enemies of France at Fleurus, Nerwinde, and Steinkerke, and enjoyed the distinction of being called the "Upholsterer of Nôtre-Dame," as a consequence of the numerous trophies he captured from the enemy, and presented to the Cathedral. However, those who take a keen interest in the mysteries of history will probably always feel, that, in spite of everything, there exists a period of suspicion in the life of the Maréchal de Luxembourg.

This point, however, was not the most disturbing nor the most important in the "Affaire des Poisons et des Sorciers". From the beginning of the examination a thousand indications had suggested to the Judges that mysterious conspiracies had encircled and menaced Louis XIV for many years past; but, despite their perspicacity and all their efforts, they had been unable to fathom them. The case of the Maréchal de Luxembourg had been only a side-issue. Plots had evidently been hatched in closer proximity to the King, aiming at him in a more intimate and personal manner. So much had been divined from La Voisin's attitude, from the reticences of her associates, and from the affectation of ignorance as to any suggestion of such a conspiracy which was uniformly displayed by the whole crowd of magicians under examination. The great anxiety of the *Chambre Ardente* was to unravel this pre-eminent factor in the affair. On the 21st of May, 1679, Catherine Boulé, otherwise the widow Trianon, had been severely questioned on the point. She was known to have been the intimate friend of La Voisin, to have lived under the same roof as Dodée, and to have been *au*

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*couvant* with all the important manifestations of the gang. However, her replies shed no light at all on the designs on the King. One passage alone in her deposition appeared to arouse interest—when she stated that a great Lady of the Court had come to consult her, but that, owing to her disguise, she had not been able to discover who she was.

On the whole, by the beginning of the summer of 1680 the most definite information in respect to the matter of the King had been derived from the confidences made by La Voisin to her guardians in the prison. They were much more important, from the point of view of the activities against the King, than any confession she had made, even when she had been under the torture. She had, in fact, confided to her guardians that what she feared above everything was "that she would be asked to explain her journey to Saint-Germain". Such journey had been made by La Voisin, on the 5th of March, 1679, for the purpose of handing to Louis XIV a petition, though one of her friends, a servant at the Court, had offered to do it for her. Continuing to make further allusions to this same journey, La Voisin had added: "God *protected* the King". This very precise use of the past tense indicated that La Voisin had known of some great danger that the King had run on that particular day, and that in her opinion the protection of God averted it. So precise a knowledge of this danger proved that La Voisin herself could not have been unconnected with it; and consequently the hypothesis might be assumed that she herself had been one of the actual agents in the matter, and that conceivably the petition she desired to present to the King had been the actual source of the danger. Such must have been the reasoning of the Judges, for they attached a very great importance to these admissions, and ceased to attempt to extract anything more categorical out of La Voisin herself. But they began again to cross-examine La Trianon, while at the same time they began to have hopes of learning a great deal from Marguerite Monvoisin.

On the 19th of August, 1680, La Trianon was confronted with Marguerite Monvoisin, and admitted having said to the girl: "The journey to Saint-Germain was the cause of your mother's arrest". On that day, also, the question was raised

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as to a certain horoscope that La Voisin had drawn, and to the fact that, when doing it, she had made reference to a "crime against the State". Both women asserted that such "crime against the State" referred only to the journey to Saint-Germain. Suspicions became more definite, and the Court now perceived the possibility of learning from others what it was unable to extract from La Voisin. The very fact of La Voisin being in the same prison as the remainder of those accused by the *Chambre Ardente* seemed to be in itself an obstacle to the other prisoners confessing; and the Court decided that the time had arrived for her to be put to death. On the 19th June, 1679, La Chéron had already been burned on the Place de Grève, and on the 14th of July, 1679, the wife of the shoemaker Durand—a client of La Voisin, who had charged her with having poisoned her husband with the powders she had sold her, the truth of the accusation being verified—met a similar fate. On the 14th August, 1679, La Le Père, Voisin's usual accomplice, had been hanged; and on the 14th of July, 1680, Gilles Davot, the sacrilegious priest who had been a substitute for Guibourg or Mariette in the Black Masses arranged by La Voisin, died in the same way. It was now La Voisin herself who was to pay for her crimes with her life. The approach of death did not weaken her. Up to the last moment she refused to make any further statement, and she turned to religion for strength to meet the coming ordeal. On the 22nd of August, 1680, she did penance before the door of *Nôtre-Dame*, and was then burned alive. A sensational item to be noted was that the same executioner who had formerly been her lover was in the first instance detailed to superintend her death. He was, however, changed at the last moment, and La Voisin died in an edifying manner, hoping doubtless thereby to atone for a life that had been one long line of crimes of the most daring and dreadful description. She was thirty-five years old, and she had gained a renown such as had been denied to most of the Queens of her time.

Once La Voisin was dead, the remaining prisoners, in obedience to their own instincts, appeared more inclined to tell what they knew. Marguerite Monvoisin lost that furtive sense of fear which had caused her so often to remain silent while her stepmother was still alive. But the one whose

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confessions thenceforth dominated the whole affair was Lesage. Louvois had summed him up as a man devoid of principle and conviction, who had associated himself with the contemporary sorcerers in their gravest crimes, and who *consequently was the most likely person from whom to get information*, provided he were handled in the proper way—and such way it appeared to him would be to offer to spare his life on the condition that he made full confession. They, of course, knew him to be a born liar ; but it would not be difficult with the help of the other prisoners to check his statements. This offer of his life proved too great a temptation for Lesage, and he readily consented to disclose all that he knew ; and in a short time the whole *Chambre Ardente* was listening with horror to his avowals. The Judges earnestly trusted he was lying ; but his statements were confirmed by the evidence of Marguerite Monvoisin. The woman Manon Aubert, who had been put into Marguerite Monvoisin's cell as a spy to make her talk, also had conversations to report in confirmation of Lesage's revelations. And there were others—Latour, the former cruel and authoritative lover of La Voisin, who had shared his mistress' life of crime—Guibourg, the sacrilegious priest—the woman La Pierre, another accomplice of La Voisin—all these, without having had any communication with one another, accused, to the stupor of the *Chambre Ardente*, the same puissant personality as Lesage had already done. As a matter of fact, this was not actually the first time that this distinguished name had been mentioned in the cross-examinations, for Vanens' valet, La Chaboissière, had said in his evidence that " the Chevalier de Vanens had deserved to have been drawn and quartered for the advice he had given Madame de Montespan ". But the valet, frightened at his own avowal, had immediately withdrawn it, and the Judges had regarded the utterance as having been made in a spirit of revenge.

Now, however, the name of Madame de Montespan was in the mouth of every sorcerer and prisoner, brought up for examination—Madame de Montespan, the Court's radiant beauty, whose most indifferent smile would bring happiness to any courtier, who had founded a line of legitimized Princes and Princesses of the Blood Royal, whom Louis XIV had

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presented to the foreign ambassadors in her golden raiment, as the Personification of Love and Power, whose father had been Governor of Paris, and whose brother was Maréchal de France—she, Madame de Montespan, was now accused of having had criminal dealings with this vile and repulsive crowd of poisoners and demoniacal magicians, who for the sake of gold had murdered, blasphemed, and been guilty of every imaginable enormity! Lesage had said before the *Chambre Ardente* Commissioners: "Strange things would come to light if you arrested La Filastre"—and it was, in fact, through this woman that the Judges were to arrive at the true explanation of the criminal mysteries which had been baffling them since April, 1679. La Filastre's deposition was to transform the "*Affaire des Poisons*" into a royal tragedy of a harrowing and terrible kind. The blow was all the greater to Louis XIV, who had been so shamelessly deceived by the woman whom he had covered with honour and glory, since his royal dignity and the welfare of his kingdom demanded that he should pardon her—at least to all outward appearances—and even do injury to justice by concealing her crimes.

It was on the 30th of September and the 1st of October that La Filastre occupied "the culprit's stool". Not only did she confirm all that Lesage and the girl Monvoisin and the others had said, but she gave such precise and hideous details in regard to the final criminal devices of Madame de Montespan, that Louis XIV, overcome with horror and disgust, gave orders for the immediate suspension of the sittings of the *Chambre Ardente* (1st October, 1680). He would not at any price have had his subjects know to what depth of degradation the woman had fallen whom he had raised to such a height, who had become the mother of his children, now taking precedence over the entire nobility of France, and who for so many years had been the centre of his Court. What a depth of humiliation also for him, if after having—as he informed Madame de Montespan herself—"renounced his own reputation in order to love a woman whom he now had grave reasons to know had never been worthy of his affection", France should learn that this self-same woman had subjected her royal lover to demoniacal experiments, and had finally attempted to avenge herself by poisoning him! So, not only



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did Louis XIV suspend the sittings of the *Chambre Ardente*, but he actually removed from the official report of La Filastre's evidence everything that was compromising to Madame de Montespan. Indeed, among the extracts collected by Maître Brunet, and now preserved in the Library of the Corps Législatif, is a document worded as follows :

“ The King, having had submitted to him the official report of the woman Filastre's evidence, and being unwilling to permit, for wise and equitable reasons of importance to the State, that certain facts should be inserted in the copies, which will be made for the use of the *Chambre de l'Arsenal*, His Majesty in Council has ordered that the minutes and originals of the said acts shall be submitted to Monsieur le Chancelier by the Clerk of the Commission, and that in his presence the said Clerk shall make an engrossment of the said acts, in which the said facts shall not be inserted.

Given by the King-in-Council, His Majesty being present.”

The documents, which the King had had removed from the official record of La Filastre's evidence, and all such as throughout the trial had had reference to the criminal activities of Madame de Montespan, were by order of Louis XIV enclosed in a chest, which was sealed and deposited in the safe custody of the Clerk of the *Chambre Ardente*. On the 13th of July, 1709, Louis XIV had this chest brought back into his cabinet, and, in the presence of Chancellor Pontchartrain, he burned all the documents it contained. By acting thus, Louis XIV imagined that he was wiping out every trace of the crimes committed by his Favourite. But the rest of the Proceedings of the *Chambre Ardente*, elucidated as they are by Reynie's memoranda, which his heirs preserved, have proved sufficient to admit of a reconstruction of the facts, which the Great King had hoped to conceal from posterity, in the same way as he had managed to do in respect to his contemporaries. And to-day we are in a position to know what the most favoured courtiers of Louis XIV had no knowledge of, and what the astute and intuitive Madame de Sévigné only dimly apprehended when she wrote to her daughter : “ The King treats Madame de Montespan with

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severity". About the same time, also, Bussy Rabutin wrote : "The King treats the Marquise de Montespan with contempt".

What exactly were these crimes of Madame de Montespan which Louis XIV had considered so grave as to justify him in arresting the regular course of justice? They were many in number, and of divers kinds. La Palatine struck the right note when she wrote of this Favourite: "She is more ambitious than dissolute". For, in reality, it was her ambition that relentlessly drove her from pillar to post, till she actually found herself plotting the King's death. From the moment she arrived at the Court, the position of Louise de la Vallière had become a veritable torture to her, and from 1666 she did her utmost to undermine its already endangered foundations. She ingratiated herself with the Queen and Louise de la Vallière with the sole purpose of arriving at her goal—the King. At the same time, she was visiting the sorceresses with a view to ascertain what power they had to bring misfortune on the gentle, unassuming Favourite (1666). On the advice of La Voisin, she directed against La Vallière, in 1667, the series of incantations which were conducted by Mariette and Lesage. The ceremony took place in Paris, in the Rue de la Tannerie. Madame de Montespan expressed her readiness to promise anything to Astoreth and Asmodeus, the Demon-destroyers of domestic happiness, if Louise de la Vallière could be ousted and if she herself were to take her place. Later on, the black art was applied to the hearts of two pigeons—representing respectively the hearts of Louis XIV and Louise de la Vallière. Mariette again officiated; but they had all moved from the Rue de la Tannerie to the Church of Saint-Séverin, with a view to obtaining more certain results, for it was a well-known fact that sacrilege, actually committed in a church, was much more acceptable to the Prince of Darkness. At the beginning of 1668 Mariette and Lesage, still the tools of La Voisin, repaired to Saint-Germain for the purpose of conducting aromatic fumigations and satanic incantations in favour of Madame de Montespan, in the rooms of her sister, Madame de Thianges. As things turned out, everything pointed to the fact that the Devil really had the power to gratify Madame de Montespan's feverish ambition, for at the end of that same

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year, 1668, Louis XIV, entirely subjugated by the dazzling beauty and sparkling wit of this scheming scion of the Mortemarts, avowed to her his love, and took her to his heart. In 1669 Madame de Montespan gave birth to the Duc de Maine, who, later on, was to become the favourite son of all the King's children.

It was after this triumph on the part of Madame de Montespan that Mariette and Lesage, holding strongly to the opinion that La Voisin was taking even more than the lion's share out of the profits of their joint operations, attempted to replace her in the association by the sorceress Duverger, who was prepared to evince less greed. In retaliation, La Voisin exerted herself to such effect that she succeeded in having Mariette and Lesage—now passing under the name of Dubuisson—arrested. Mariette, who was first condemned to exile and then imprisoned, escaped by the aid of La Voisin, who had forgiven him. Lesage was pardoned, and the trio entered into a fresh association—and it was to them that Madame de Montespan had recourse again in 1672. She had become conscious that, after a three years' run of passionate ardour, Louis XIV's love for her was on the wane; and, jealous and uneasy, she returned to La Voisin to seek her advice and assistance. Her mental attitude was such as to make her indifferent as to what manner of crime she might commit, and accordingly, at the beginning of 1673, she submitted without protest to the horrors of the Black Mass, and even to the humiliation of having her naked body used as an altar for the first of the three masses<sup>1</sup> that had to be celebrated.

As had happened before with the fumigations and incantations, the Black Mass appeared to have a tremendous effect upon the King. Louis XIV redoubled his attentions to his mistress, and Madame de Montespan regained her peace of mind and her old position. However, in 1675 it was again assailed, and this time in a more formidable manner. The King, coming under the influence of Lent, with its special services and sermons, suddenly gave himself up wholly to religion, experiencing a deep and bitter sense of repentance for his past faults. The Favourite did not hesitate to imitate her lover in

<sup>1</sup> See chapter on *Madame de Montespan*.

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his devotion ; but, unfortunately, on the Thursday before Easter she was refused absolution. Bossuet went so far as to insist that the King should send his mistress away from the Court ; and on the 14th of April, 1675, Louis XIV directed Madame de Montespan to retire to Vaugirard, where her children and their guardian were living.

Once in Paris, the Marquise immediately went to La Voisin, who, well provided at the moment through the initiative of the *intelligentsia* of the corporation with different treatments for different cases, prescribed this time certain powders for the King. Far from being inoffensive, these powders, if taken in sufficient quantity, could easily have resulted in death. Every detail regarding them was revealed in the cross-examinations held between the 8th and the 16th of November, 1680. For, although, by order of Louis XIV, the Chambre Ardente had suspended its sittings, La Reynie, the Chancellor, Louvois, and a few others in the confidence of the King continued to make every effort to sift the terrible business to the bottom. The accused, under examination on those particular days, were the Abbé Guibourg—an old man of seventy, and the most hideous of all the sacrilegious priests—Lemaire, who had been imprisoned in Vincennes with the Abbé Guibourg—Lesage—and Marguerite Monvoisin. The statements of these various criminals almost wholly cleared up the matter of these powders. They disclosed that probably Madame de Montespan had arranged for the King to take La Voisin's powders through the agency of two " *officiers du gobelet* ". One of these two men was Duchesne, a former lackey to Monsieur d'Aubray d'Offémont, whom the Marquise had introduced into the King's service, and in whom she had always taken a particular interest. The other was Gilot, a great believer in magic, who since 1668 had obviously dabbled in impious practices, and whom Madame de Montespan had sent several times to consult Lesage on her behalf. In every case, the powders were very skilfully administered, for Louis XIV had not the slightest suspicion that he had taken them. But the daily record of the King's health, which was kept by his head physician d'Aquin, mentions at this time that His Majesty was suffering from very violent headaches and repeated attacks of giddiness. It is impossible to ignore the

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reciprocal relation between these irregularities in the King's health and the administration of the sorceress' powders. The Vincennes prisoners stated that Madame de Montespan had paid La Voisin fifty louis d'or for the powders on the day the latter had taken them to the Marquise at Clagny. But it appears that Madame de Montespan had every reason to congratulate herself on having made use of this treatment ; for, after her return to the Court (15th of May, 1675) and the King had taken a full course as prescribed by La Voisin, Louis XIV had a paroxysm of love for his mistress. In fact, within less than a year the Comte de Toulouse was born, and in the following year Mademoiselle de Blois.

However, even before the birth of Mademoiselle de Blois Louis XIV was again unfaithful to Madame de Montespan. " All this suggests fresh blood in Quanto's country " <sup>1</sup>, wrote Madame de Sévigné, at this time ; and, as a matter of fact, Louis XIV appeared about then to be very strongly attracted, in quick succession and even at times conjointly, by the charms of the Princesse de Soubise, Madame de Louvigny, Mademoiselle de Rochefort-Théobon, and Madame de Ludres. Madame de Montespan at once had recourse to the Black Masses, with their infamous sacrifice of children. Again the Marquise submitted to the humiliation of having her naked body used as an altar for the first of the three masses, composing the necessary group, a very large sum of money being paid to La Voisin to take her place in the other two. All the details relating to these Black Masses were obtained by La Reynie by means of the cross-examinations and confrontations of Guibourg and Marguerite Monvoisin, on the 23rd of October, 1680. " Every time ", said Marguerite Monvoisin, " that anything fresh happened to Madame de Montespan to make her afraid of her losing her favour with the King, she came to my mother to provide her with some remedy, and my mother at once had recourse to the priests, by whom she had the Masses said, and gave her powders for the King to take ". The Black Masses of 1675 succeeded in the same way as the earlier one had done. Louis XIV again fell at the knees of Madame de Montespan, who, more superb than ever, dared

<sup>1</sup> " *Quanto* " ? an Italian word meaning " how much ? " was the witty nickname given by Madame de Sévigné to La Montespan.

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haughtily, in June, 1677, to treat Madame de Ludres before the whole Court as a mere "rag".

This triumph, however, was to be the last that Madame de Montespan was to enjoy. At the beginning of 1679 there arrived at the Court a radiant young girl of eighteen, fair as the corn in June, fresh as the roses in May, and, as Madame de Sévigné wrote, "beautiful as an angel"—Marie-Angélique de Scorailles, Demoiselle de Fontanges. All her relations—father, uncles, and cousins—had clubbed together to equip her for the Court in a manner worthy of the King's attention, trusting, that once His Majesty had set eyes on her dazzling beauty, they would make large profits out of the transaction. And they were right, for one glance on the part of the King at Marie-Angélique de Fontanges vanquished him. Compared with her, all the other beauties of the Court appeared to him faded and stale; and Madame de Montespan herself had not, for one moment, the slightest chance of competing against a loveliness so pure and brilliant, and so artistically perfect. From the first day, the Favourite realized that she was defeated. The time had passed for incantations and Black Masses whereby to regain for her a position which was now irretrievably lost. It had become a question of avenging herself for a definite desertion on the part of the King, and on a woman who had insulted her by her beauty, and also by having dared actually to send her presents. And, to avenge a Madame de Montespan, finally discarded, both Louis XIV and La Fontanges had to die!

This time, two famous sorceresses were employed by the Favourite—La Trianon and La Voisin. The plot was worked out in a little room which La Voisin had in the Rue Beau-regard. A subtle poison, which La Trianon was in a position to procure, was to be smeared over a petition, which La Voisin herself was to present to Louis XIV at Saint-Germain. The poison in question was of such a nature as to prove fatal, should the King merely inhale it when he opened the petition. But, in order to ensure a continuance of its potency it was indispensable that it should not come into contact with the air until the very moment when it was required to act. For this reason the delivery of the petition was just as important as the fabrication of the poison, and La Voisin, having under-

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taken to present it herself, was promised by Madame de Montespan, no less than one-hundred-thousand gold-crowns, which would be worth to-day more than a million francs. It is not known exactly what Madame de Montespan was to pay La Trianon, but it was certain to have been considerably less than what she had promised La Voisin. Mademoiselle de Fontanges was to be poisoned in a much slower manner than the King. It was planned that she should be given the appearance of dying of a decline arising out of grief for the death of the King. To effect this, Romani, the *fiancé* of Marguerite Monvoisin, was to be disguised as a dealer in fabrics, and was to present himself at Mademoiselle de Fontanges' accompanied by Bertrand, his accomplice, disguised as a servant. Both of them were to display to the young Duchess textures and tissues, gloves, fans, and trifles of irresistible attractiveness, all of which would have been carefully treated beforehand by the most dexterous alchemists. None of the conspirators doubted for a moment that, coquette as she was, the young Duchess would gleefully purchase any number of the dainty articles offered to her. And then she would robe herself in poisoned fabrics, bring the surface of her white hands into contact with deadly gloves, inhale the perfumes of septic fans and of baneful lace, and adorn herself with ribbons emitting noxious vapours—and so, without knowing the reason why, she would move slowly to her death.

La Voisin, provided with the lethal petition prepared by La Trianon, set out for Saint-Germain, accompanied by Romani and Bertrand, on the 5th of March, 1679, in order to lay her plans for putting the terrible conspiracy into execution. But, in spite of repeated attempts, she was unable to approach the King. She returned home on the 9th of June, deeply irritated. On the 10th the missionaries of Saint-Vincent de Paul called at her house, and the sorceress, frightened at the sight of them, ordered her step-daughter to burn the petition. On the 12th of March she was arrested. By the light of these facts, the remark she made, when in prison, "God protected the King", is easy to understand. But the arrest of La Voisin did not defeat La Montespan, although, on hearing of it, she had departed from the Court (15th of March, 1679). She at once turned to La Filastre to pursue the matter of the

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poisoning of the King and Mademoiselle de Fontanges. La Filastre did not possess the scientific knowledge which had enabled La Trianon to infect the petition. But she was aware that Galet, at Caen, and several alchemists in Auvergne possessed the secret of being able "to administer poison without its being detected". So, after arranging the matter with Madame de Montespan, La Filastre departed for Caen, and thence into Auvergne. On her return to Paris, she at once took steps to get into personal contact with Mademoiselle de Fontanges; but it was just at this moment that Lesage was assuring the Judges of the *Chambre Ardente* that "strange things would come to light if you arrest La Filastre". So she also was arrested, without having been able to use the subtle poisons which she had procured for the purpose of satisfying the rancour of Madame de Montespan.

Such was the dreadful and complicated story of the various attempts to poison Louis XIV and the Duchesse de Fontanges which La Filastre related when under examination on the 30th of September and the 1st of October, 1680—an examination which resulted in the immediate and dramatic suspension of the sittings of the *Chambre Ardente*. It is easy to understand why Louvois wrote to La Reynie, on receipt of letters from the latter on the subject of these lamentable events: "17th of October, 1680. I am in receipt of the letters you have done me the honour to write. Their contents have caused profound grief to the King". It is also easy to understand why this minister—sympathizing with the grief of the King, yet still remaining friendly disposed towards Madame de Montespan—did his utmost to prevent Mademoiselle des Œillets from having to appear before the *Chambre Ardente*; for she was the confidential and devoted lady-companion of the Favourite, the woman on whom she had most depended, and whom she had often used as an intermediary between herself and the gang of sorcerers. But he examined her himself in his cabinet on the 18th of November, 1680; and, having confronted her with the Vincennes prisoners, it at once became obvious both to himself and the King that all of them were perfectly acquainted with her. Mademoiselle des Œillets was, accordingly, under *lettre-de-cachet*, condemned to solitary confinement for life. She died on the 8th of September,



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1686, in the Tours hospital. Louvois had even attempted to reconcile Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan. In August, 1680, before the suspicions had been definitely verified, he contrived an interview between the two, at the commencement of which Madame de Montespan burst into tears. But her dominating and violent temper soon getting the upper hand, she reproached the King with his infidelities and the manner in which he had treated her. She made a merit of her love, for having, she said, endured his physical defects, such as the odour of his breath. She even defied him. Doubtless he could chastize her for her indiscretions and mistakes, but he had to remember that in punishing her he would be punishing the mother of his own children. All France, all Europe even, would necessarily associate him with the humiliation of the mother of his own legitimized children—and to do so would be only justice. Madame de Montespan departed from the interview secure in the knowledge of her impunity; for Louis XIV thought as she did, and the same opinion was held by his Ministers and all those who realized how such a scandal would react on the Throne and country. But, on the other hand, from that moment the Favourite was irrevocably swept out of the King's affections. Thenceforth, if the discarded mistress was still tolerated at the Court, it was only to save appearances and the honour of the Throne. She had to abandon her great suite of rooms on the first floor, to be relegated to others at the extremity of the Château. From the date that the King acquired absolute proof of her crimes, he never spoke to her again, not even in public; and, if occasionally he had to cross the salon of his former mistress, he did so as though unconscious of her existence.

At length, on the 15th of March, 1691, Madame de Montespan, ignored by almost the whole Court, and acting on the entreaties of her own son, the Duc du Maine, withdrew from Versailles to the Convent of Saint-Joseph, which she herself had founded in Paris. In 1692, Louis XIV did not allow her to be present at the marriages of her children, the Duc du Maine and Mademoiselle de Blois, nor even to sign their contracts. And, when she died on the 27th of May, 1707, her own children were not permitted to go into mourning.

The superb and elegant Fontanges did not live long after

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Madame de Montespan's disgrace. She died on the 28th of June, 1681, at the early age of twenty-two, at the Abbey of Port-Royal, of which her sister was the Abbess—in the Quartier Saint-Jacques, Paris. Many people, including Madame de Maintenon, her niece Madame de Caylus, the Princesse Palatine, and Bussy Rabutin regarded her death as being the direct outcome of Madame de Montespan's revenge. At the time, however, it was officially declared that the unfortunate young woman had died a natural death. She was stated to have died from pleuro-pneumonia of tuberculous origin, the course of the malady having been expedited by the disorders following on the birth of Louis XIV's son, who died almost at once. The young Duchess herself, however, remained convinced throughout her illness that she was dying from poison administered by her rival; and Louis XIV, without openly admitting it, shared the same opinion—which explains why he attempted to prevent, though not actually forbidding it, a post-mortem examination of the body of the Duchess. But the family insisted upon it, and the King gave way. The physicians came to the conclusion that Mademoiselle de Fontanges had died from natural causes; and posterity must content itself with considering whether learned men are necessarily immune from susceptibility to the desires of Kings.

In the meantime, La Reynie was desiring with the full strength of his forceful personality to be enabled to reopen the *Chambre Ardente*; and finally Louis XIV yielded to his unanswerable representations. On the 19th of May, 1681, the Judges resumed their labours, restricted, however, with the definite prohibition "that no steps of any kind were to be taken in respect to the declarations, contained in the official reports of the examination and execution of *La Filastre*". The Judges, accordingly, were limited in the scope of their power of arrest. The Duchesse de Vivonne, who had had recourse to exactly the same practices as Madame de Montespan in her attempt to gain the King's heart, was not proceeded against, in consequence of her being the former Favourite's sister-in-law, and of her daughter having married Colbert's son. A number of personages under suspicion of complicity in these charges of magic or poisoning were

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allowed to fly the country, without being interfered with. Among them were the Comtesse de Soissons<sup>1</sup>, her friend, the Marquise d'Allyre, the Comtesse de Polignac, le Comte Clermont-Lodève, the Marquis de Cessac, and many others. So we find Madame de Sévigné writing at this period : " The correct note of the moment is the innocence of the accused and the horror of scandal ".

But the greater number of those who escaped the jurisdiction of the Chambre Ardente were composed of people who had in one way or another been mixed up in the activities of Madame de Montespan. Neither the Judges nor the nation were to be permitted to know anything concerning that particular gang. Louvois himself undertook the direction of their specific destinies. He obtained from the King *lettres-de-cachet*, which enabled him to distribute the wretches among the strongest and most inaccessible fortresses in the kingdom. Each of them had to be chained to the exact spot decided upon by the Minister ; and every chain had one end embedded in the wall and the other shackled to the body of the prisoner. In addition to this, the chain was made just long enough to allow the prisoner to lie down, sit, or stand as he might choose. The principal prisons, selected for this purpose by Louvois, were those of Besançon, Belle-Isle-en-mer, Saint-André-des-Salins, and Villefranche. To Besançon were despatched Guibourg, who died there three years later—Lesage, the channel through which the whole truth of the " Affaire des Poisons " had been obtained—Galet, the fabricator of poison, at Caen—and Romani, who had hoped to play so great a rôle in the death of Mademoiselle de Fontanges. At Saint-André-des-Salins there were only women—about fifteen of them. Among them were probably the intimate friend of Mademoiselle des Œillets and her chosen confidante, Madame de Villedieu, who, on being arrested, had said : " It is astonishing that I should be imprisoned when I have only gone once to La Voisin, while Mademoiselle des Œillets, who has been more than fifty times, is left at liberty ". At Belle-Isle-en-mer were incarcerated La Pelletier, La Poulain, La Delaporte, Marguerite Monvoisin, and Catherine Leroy, while Manon Auber, who had been employed to spy on Marguerite

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *Olympe Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons*.

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Monvoisin, was merely made to enter a Convent of Ursulines, where she had to submit to the rules of the Order. La Guesdon and La Chapelain were imprisoned at Villefranche. The former died only after thirty-six years of this grim imprisonment, and the latter, on the 4th of June, 1724, after forty. All these persons thus allocated by Louvois remained in their respective prisons till the day of their death. He had been so astute as to suggest that any of them attempting to make reference to their conviction, or its causes, should each time be severely whipped, adding that they were all liars of a monomaniacal type, and that nothing but repeated whippings would stop them from talking.

In spite of the numerous cases that managed to escape, and had been removed from the jurisdiction of the Court, the *Chambre Ardente* condemned thirty-six to death, five to hard-labour at the galleys and twenty-three to exile. Two of the accused, one of whom was La Trianon, died during the course of the trial, and a third, La Dodée, committed suicide. The *Chambre Ardente* finally concluded its labours by condemning to death Jean Maillard, auditor to the *Chambre des Comptes*, and La Chaboissière, Vanens' valet—both of whom were executed, shortly afterwards. A *lettre-de-cachet*, on the part of Louis XIV, dated the 21st of July, 1692, brought its functions to an end.

Faced by such sorrows and infamies as the labours of the *Chambre Ardente* disclosed, the human mind is stunned, and steeped in melancholy. It gropes to understand how such shameful wickedness could have existed in a period which produced great classic writers of such high intelligence and exalted feeling, dominant geniuses in all the arts, famous generals who made Europe tremble, and tender hearts consumed by a passion for humanity, like Saint-Vincent de Paul or Pascal. On the assumption that humanity cannot with impunity rise beyond a certain altitude, it is possible to regard this depth of depravity as the price that had necessarily to be paid for so much greatness. Has not Pascal said : "*Qui fait l'ange fait la bête*". Moreover, even in the gloom of the *Chambre Ardente*, does not La Reynie, in his tireless efforts for the triumph of justice and indefatigable ardour for his work, stand out as a noble figure, bringing comfort and

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encouragement ? And Louis XIV himself—is there not something pathetic in his self-imposed attitude towards Madame de Montespan, for the sake of the dignity of France and the love he bore his children ? And, finally, it was this lamentable “ Affaire des Poisons ” that gave birth to the edict of the 31st of August, 1682, which, drafted by La Reynie in collaboration with Colbert, rigidly and authoritatively regulated the whole question of the manufacture and sale of poisons, in respect both to industry and to medicine. It was a masterly piece of work, which has averted incalculable harm, and which, even to-day, protects the French nation against criminal enterprise.

## MARIE-ANNE MANCINI

DUCHESSE DE BOUILLON

[1649-1714]

Marie-Anne Mancini was the youngest of Mazarin's nieces—a charming little person, who knew, almost from her infancy, how to make people fond of her by her coaxing, winning ways. She came to the Court of France very young, and from the first she was treated by Anne of Austria and the Cardinal as a little live doll. They played with her as they might have played with some costly toy that enchants the eye, provides amusement by its fascinating tricks, and appears almost to be gifted with positive intelligence. Marie-Anne was so utterly sweet, when teased, that teasing her had become the favourite game. So far back as 1654, when Anne-Marie was only five years old, Anne of Austria used to play little jokes at her expense, some of which appear in our eyes to have been scarcely suitable for a tiny child. The mention of one of such jokes will be sufficient to prove how very peculiar and unexpected they were, considering that they were played on a child of five. One morning, Marie-Anne, on awakening, found, sleeping in her bed beside her a newly-born baby. The little girl naturally was greatly astonished; and, seized with sudden apprehension, she called out loudly. Mazarin and the Queen, who had been waiting for this, ran to her bedside, and informed her she was the baby's mother, with the assurance that it had been born in the night. The little girl looked for a long time, very seriously, at her uncle and the Queen, as though carefully considering the matter, and then, in a sedate and thoughtful tone, she remarked: "The child can only be the son of the King, or of Monsieur de Guiche, for they are the only two men who have kissed me".

Marie-Anne delighted the whole Court with her ready wit, which was of a particularly diverting kind. She was also very quick in her mental development, and at twelve years old was

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capable of writing very pretty letters in verse to her uncle, who made a point of always replying, but in prose. Her beauty developed as quickly as her intelligence, and at thirteen she was already grown up, possessing a personality which charmed everyone who met her.

She derived her charm almost wholly from her graceful and pretty little ways. She was small, but admirably made. Her dainty little face—even too small, perhaps—was characterized by an audacious little *retroussé* nose that had something infinitely impertinent about it. It gave her whole physiognomy a daring and roguish expression, of almost infectious impudence. She had a subtle, enigmatic smile; brilliant, laughing eyes; and a complexion that glowed with youth and health. A magnificent mass of bright, fair hair crowned her well-shaped head. Her feet and hands, which she somewhat obtrusively displayed because she knew them to be admired, were as dainty as the feet and hands of a fairy. The whole of her little, alert person was enveloped in an infinite grace, combined with a marked air of distinction. At times, even, this little person contrived to give an impression of pride and grandeur. La Fontaine was to call her, at a later date: "The Mother of all the Loves, and Queen of all the Graces"; and Benserade was to exclaim:

" Oh ! never was one,  
In body and mind,  
Developed so early as she ! " <sup>1</sup>

Marie-Anne was too precocious not to be soon sought in matrimony. Turenne was the first to take cognizance of her, and to suggest his nephew as a husband. But Mazarin did not consider the Duc de Bouillon a good enough *parti* for Marie-Anne. She was so attractive, delectable, and winsome, that the astute diplomat felt that, with her high spirits and charm, she ought easily to captivate at least a Prince. Mazarin, however, died without having found a husband for his pretty little doll. During his last illness, attempts were made to induce him to arrange a marriage for her with a man of his own choice; but he made no effort to take any steps in the matter.

<sup>1</sup> " *Pas une n'eut jamais  
Et l'esprit et le sein  
Formés d'aussi bonne heure.*"

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Thus Marie-Anne, on the death of her uncle, found herself entirely untrammelled, and she took advantage of such freedom, to accept the one who had been the first to solicit her hand, Godefroy Maurice de la Tour d'Auvergne, Duc de Bouillon, and nephew of Turenne. The marriage took place with great pomp in Paris, on the 20th of February, 1662. The bride looked exquisite, and the good-looks of the husband were in every way worthy of the bride.

The young couple started life under the happiest auspices. They were rich, both of them were endowed with exceptional physical qualities, and they were, or at any rate they believed themselves to be, deeply in love. For three years they had been longing for one another, and neither of them had a doubt but that their marriage would be the gateway to a life-long happiness. Their disappointment, however, began on the day after their marriage. These two young people had not a single taste in common. The Duke admired his little Duchess immensely—but what on earth had they to talk about? He could not continually be talking of her beauty, especially as he considered, from the point of view of his conjugal security, that she was more than sufficiently aware of it already. None the less, there were no other subjects possible between them. For, as a matter of fact, Monsieur de la Tour d'Auvergne was interested only in military subjects, and could talk of nothing else. Literature and matters of intellectual interest were absolutely outside his concern. His mind seemed incapable of comprehending them, and his instinctive antipathy towards such spheres of thought made it all the more difficult for him to attempt to do so. He had never read anything, and had no intention whatever to begin. Actual men-of-letters produced on him the sort of effect that an operator does on a patient who has no desire to be operated upon.

The Duchesse de Bouillon, who, on the contrary, had an innate sense for literature, worshipped the whole world of letters. The little girl, who had written charming verses when twelve years old, had become a veritable scribe, writing brightly and attractively on all subjects of interest; and her conversation was as animated and literary as her pen. She found time to read everything, to discuss everything, and to locate everything in her little head. She was acquainted with



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nearly all the authors, and she liked every one of them. She would have renounced her sleep and exercise to talk literature and to converse with writers of note. On the other hand, she had no use for the art of war. She did not see the necessity of studying how to kill one another ; and it was for this reason that Marshals and Generals were not much to her liking.

How could two young people so utterly different be happy together ? They wanted to be so ; but it was all to no purpose. The Duc de Bouillon, still very enamoured of his wife, consented to her pursuing her own tastes on the understanding that he should not be expected to take part in them ; and she at once made her house the place or rendezvous for a small Academy. Sagrais, Benserade, Ménage, and Madame Deshoulières were its permanent members, but all the keen intellects of the time were to be found there. The Academy's attentions were devoted to all the published works of the period, and also to the perfecting of the French language. Marie-Anne de Bouillon, at the early age of fifteen, was the admired and idolized President of this literary coterie. She could give an opinion on every subject, and impose her rule on all—not fighting shy even of Latin. But the Duke had no place in this assembly ; and, feeling himself to be so out of his element in his own house, he determined to depart from it, and, like the Duchess, to be brilliant in surroundings which suited him.

Thus it came about that in the first year of their marriage the Duc de Bouillon left his wife to join the French forces fighting against Montecuculli. This early separation was the initial cause of all those that followed, and prevented the young couple from ever settling down on a common basis of mutual understanding. They both lived their own lives, independent of one another. Such a state of affairs was in every way favourable for digressions on both sides, and gave food for much gossip.

The Duchess thenceforth had two ardent pursuits—to patronize letters, and to make herself loved by men capable of understanding and appreciating her mind ; and it is to the first of these pursuits that France owes one of the most admirable and enchanting works in its whole literature. But

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to the same cause, however, must be also attributed perhaps the cruellest rebuff that any dramatist has ever experienced.

In a certain year when the Duc de Bouillon was about to start for the war in Hungary, he disliked the thought of leaving his wife alone in Paris for so long a time, and he begged her to be so good as to take up her abode in their own Duchy of Château-Thierry. The Duchess, though greatly regretting to leave her town-house and particularly her Academy, submitted with good grace to her husband's request, and set out for La Champagne. Her *penchant* for writers soon put her into contact with the Ranger of the neighbouring forests, who was much more wrapped up in Tales and Fables of his own devising, than in the duties of his office. She at once came under the influence of his attraction, and a firm friendship was soon established between La Fontaine and the Duchesse de Bouillon, who regarded the famous Dreamer of Dreams from a somewhat different point of view from that held at the time by his contemporaries, who were unreservedly praising his *Contes*. He had also written a few *Fables*, but no one had paid much attention to them. The unerring taste of the Duchess at once detected that, despite the opinion of those who admired his writings, his true genius undoubtedly lay in the direction of his *Fables*. She impressed this point on the poet, and as he hesitated to accept it—for La Fontaine was greatly attached to the *gaulois* frankness of his *Contes*—she exerted all her efforts to convince him. She finally succeeded in doing so, and was able to carry off her convert to Paris when her exile in La Champagne came to an end. Once in the Capital, Marie-Anne still pursued her purpose, and to such effect that it can safely be asserted, without fear of contradiction, that the world is indebted for the dozen Books of *Fables* almost as much to the Duchesse de Bouillon as to the poet himself. Without her interposition, La Fontaine would have continued devoting himself to his *Contes* and "the spacious comedy" of his *Fables*, "in a hundred different acts, the scene of which is the universe", would have dwindled down to a few short interludes, which would have given but little inkling of the great fabulist.

The rebuff to the dramatist, due to the initiative of the

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Duchesse de Bouillon is, on the contrary, a story which does honour neither to her judgment nor her kindness of heart. It happened in 1677. Marie-Anne had returned to Paris, and her Academy had recommenced its meetings, and was occupying itself actively with all that was being written. Two dramatic authors of note had chanced to write a tragedy on the same subject at the same time. One of these tragedies was called *Phèdre*, and had been written by Racine, the tragic poet, who had already produced *Andromaque*, *Les Plaideurs*, *Britannicus*, *Bérénice*, *Bajazet*, *Mithriadate* and *Iphigénie*, a series of triumphs which had carried the name of the young writer to the heights of Corneille. The other was called, *Phèdre et Hippolyte*. It was the third tragedy written by Pradon, his two preceding ones having been *Pyrame et Thisbé* and *Tamerlan*, neither of which had been a great success. But Pradon moved in good society, and was an *habitué* of the Duchess' Academy, where he had adroitly laid himself out to please her. He had at once realized that this young patroness of letters was delighted at being consulted and being given the opportunity to express her opinion. Racine, on the other hand, did not trouble about society, and probably he had never been inside the Duchesse de Bouillon's house. In any case, his excessive sensitiveness would never have allowed of his discussing his own works there. In fact, he was not the man to please the Duchess. Such being the situation, Mazarin's niece jumped to a decision, dictated solely by her own personal bias—Pradon's tragedy had to succeed, and Racine's—well, it had to fail ! Having arrived at this decision, Marie-Anne de Bouillon left no stone unturned to carry out her design. Her incredible energy accomplished wonders. She summoned her numerous friends, inspired them with her own enthusiasm for Pradon's tragedy, her own distaste for Racine's, and the absolute necessity for backing one at the expense of the other. In short, she exerted herself to such good purpose that all her friends soon shared her feelings, together with her definite decision. On the first night of Racine's *Phèdre*, the whole body of the theatre was packed with the Duchess' friends, and they strenuously hissed Racine's tragedy from the first verse to the last. On the second night it was just the same, and so it continued for six consecutive

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performances, the Duchess having booked in advance every seat in the house. The proceeding had cost her not less than fifteen-thousand francs, but she had superbly carried her point ; for, as a consequence of the cabal, directed by her own resolute determination, Racine's tragedy was a miserable failure. Racine was so affected by this unmerited condemnation that he remained twelve years without writing anything more for the theatre, and even then only took up his pen again on the personal entreaty of Madame de Maintenon. However, by 1678, the public had reversed the opinion of the Duchesse de Bouillon, and had greeted the *Phèdre* of Racine with acclamation. As to the *Phèdre et Hippolyte* of Pradon, it gained the success which Marie-Anne de Bouillon had determined on beforehand. The Duchess again packed the theatre with her friends, and Pradon was so greatly applauded that for some time he could not believe that such applause could possibly have been aroused by his own tragedy.

Neither these literary battles nor the administration of her Academy, where she gave readings and scattered her advice wholesale, prevented Marie-Anne from gratifying her second ardent pursuit—the discovery of a man who would love her for the qualities of her mind. She thought, at one time, to have found this ideal lover in the person of her own brother-in-law, Cardinal de Bouillon. But the illusion was not of long standing, for, after the first transports, she soon realized that her brother-in-law bore too close a resemblance to her husband to make his society satisfactory or agreeable.

The Comte de Louvigny was much more to her taste. He was a younger son of the Maréchal de Grammont, and was endowed to no small degree with the wit and high spirits of his father. But the Duc de Bouillon, who was so much away from his home, happened to return at an awkward moment, and surprised the little intrigue. He was not the man to tolerate it for a moment ; and, to ensure that his wife should be placed under strict surveillance, he despatched her to the Convent of Montreuil, where she had to remain for several months. But this severe and melancholy internment by no means prevented her from continuing her obstinate search for the particular man of her dreams. And it is most likely that she discovered him in her *liaisons* with her Vendôme nephews.

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Like herself, they were refined and cultured, and, also like herself, they were entirely destitute of all moral restraint.

Despite her laxity of morals, which the Duchesse de Bouillon took no particular pains to conceal and which Louis XIV viewed with keen displeasure, the King nevertheless did not ignore her. He had been very good to all the Mancinis, and he desired to give to Marie-Anne, as he had done to the others, some special testimony of his affection. It was in 1676 that the project took shape in the King's mind. At that moment, the Duc de Créqui had recaptured the Château of the Duchy of Bouillon from the Bishop of Liège, who had been fighting against France in the war with Holland; and, immediately upon the Treaty of Nimwegen allocating it to Louis XIV, he presented it to the Duc and Duchesse de Bouillon (1678).

The Duchess did not give quite the attention to this present which the King had expected, because at the time she was wholly taken up with magic. Many horoscopes were being drawn at the Hôtel de Bouillon, astrology was being studied, and the living were communicating with the dead. The Duchess' sister, the Comtesse de Soissons, also was addicted to these practices,<sup>1</sup> and the two sisters seemed equally drawn towards these uncanny mysteries. It was whispered that both of them were in the habit of making disquieting nocturnal visits, possibly even to the sorceress La Voisin.<sup>2</sup> Such rumours were mixed up with many others, and public opinion was, therefore, only too ready to believe anything unpleasant about the Duchesse de Bouillon, when, on the 12th of March, 1679, the "Affaire des Poisons", which gave rise to the greatest scandals of the reign, burst on Paris.

Charges of poisoning and sacrilege arose from all parts of the Capital, and *soi-disant* sorcerers and sorceresses, alchemists, and poisoners of both sexes were arrested in great numbers. A special Chambre of Justice, called the "Chambre Ardente" from its analogy to Chambers of Justice in the past, which had dealt with similar crimes, was convoked to undertake the trials. The President of this Chamber was La Reynie,

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *Olympe Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons*.

<sup>2</sup> See the chapter on *Drames Mystérieux—La Voisin and her Associates*.

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a man as austere as he was just ; and from the opening of the proceedings the names of the Duchesse de Bouillon and her sister were cited by the prisoners under examination as being guilty of the very crimes of which they themselves were accused. The King, the Court, and the Town were all prepared to believe in such accusations, on account of the mysterious practices to which the two sisters had been addicted and of their general mode of life ; and the new Court of Justice came to the decision that these two great ladies had to appear before it. Upon receipt of the news the Comtesse de Soissons fled abroad. The attitude of the Duchesse de Bouillon, however, was very different from that of her sister, for she just waited, calmly and haughtily, for the day of her appearance before the *Chambre Ardente*.

This appearance was fixed for the 29th of January, 1680 ; and on that date the Duchess, looking more charming than ever, most carefully and elegantly gowned, and wreathed in smiles—though not without a provocative look of defiance on her expressive little face—had herself conducted to the Court by the Duc de Bouillon himself. The Duke, however, was fully cognizant of the accusations brought against his wife ; for Louis XIV himself had been careful to inform him on the point. And not only had he agreed to himself take his wife to the Arsenal, but he had even invited the Duc de Vendôme, who was generally supposed to be his wife's lover, to sit in their six-horsed carriage on the left of the Duchess. In doing this, the Duc de Bouillon desired to give the lie to the popular opinion on the point. Moreover, all the nobility and a large part of the magistracy had a grudge against La Reynie, which they took no trouble to hide. These privileged classes objected to being treated by the Lieutenant de Police in the same fashion as the common people ; and, as a consequence of such resentment, a manifestation in favour of the Duchesse de Bouillon was organized for the day on which she had to appear before the *Chambre Ardente*. And also it partly accounted for the reason why her husband intended to make it understood that he attached no importance whatever to the calumnies disseminated against his wife. "Madame de Bouillon", writes Madame de Sévigné, "arrived in a coach drawn by six horses, seated between her husband and her

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lover, and followed by twenty more coaches, all filled with the smartest and best-dressed gentlemen and ladies of the Court ". Such gentlemen and ladies, however, were there more as a protest against La Reynie than through friendship for Madame de Bouillon.

On arrival at the session-hall, the Duchess sat down as though in her own drawing-room, and waited, disdainfully and mockingly, for the Judges to give her their attention. Before replying to the first question that was addressed to her, she affirmed her right to be tried only by the assembled chambers of Parliament, and requested that it should be recorded that she came there only out of her respect for the King, having none for the Chamber, which she did not recognize, and that she had no intentions of relinquishing her ducal privileges. After a few minutes, the President himself addressed Marie-Anne. " Why do you desire to rid yourself of your husband ? " he asked—for the charge against her was of having attempted to poison her husband. " I ! " she cried, " I rid myself of my husband ! You have only to ask him what he thinks about it himself. He has come with me to this very door." Then La Reynie, with a sudden change of question, said : " It is affirmed that you have seen the Devil—is that true ? " Marie-Anne, as prompt in reply as she would have been in her own drawing-room, and with her customary quickness of wit, swiftly answered back : " I see him at this moment—ugly, old, and disguised as a Councillor of State ". La Reynie had no difficulty whatever in recognizing the portrait.

During the whole of this sitting of the 29th of January the Duchesse de Bouillon displayed so much presence of mind, such calmness, ease of manner, naïveté, and distinction, and, moreover, looked so pretty, that the Judges gave way, and the charge was withdrawn. On the conclusion of the sitting, her friends gave her a veritable ovation, thus continuing their manifestation against La Reynie and the *Chambre Ardente*. She departed, blushing and smiling, on the arm of her husband, who had been permitted to come and fetch her from the place where she was sitting. From her seat in Court to the steps of her carriage she never ceased from scattering her smiles and little gestures of courtesy.

She had even the impudence to say, before quitting the

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hall : " Really, I never would have believed that wise men could have asked such idiotic questions."

It was for her a day of triumph.

However, Louis XIV, who was distressed at the evil rumours that had been circulated about her, sent her away to Nérac on the following 16th of February. But her exile was short. Her wit and her beauty soon obliterated her momentary ill-repute. Marie-Anne de Bouillon returned to Paris, after a visit of some duration to her sister Hortense in London, and at once she reassumed her former position in her own world, and retained it till she died. As in the past, she was still a Queen to the world of literature, and the President of her influential Academy. No trace remained of what had been merely a momentary suspicion. On the contrary, the Duchess' friends and acquaintances, by excessive amiability and infinite attention, did their utmost to make her forget the injustice under which she had so cruelly suffered.

History and her contemporaries have exonerated the Duchesse de Bouillon from the crime of which she was accused. But to-day, when her beauty is no longer before our eyes to derange our discernment, and her wit and her charm have no longer power to paralyze our judgment, we are tempted to wonder whether this woman, who had the desire and energy to bring to naught the greatest masterpiece of Racine, might not also have sought to revenge herself against a husband for having immured her in the Convent of Montreuil, and for having declined to bring his mind into unison with her own.





## MADAME DE MAINTENON

[1635-1719]

Françoise d'Aubigné was born on the 27th of November, 1635, in the Fortress of Niort, where her father was under detention for having had political dealings with England. Her grandfather was Théodore, Agrippa d'Aubigné, a poet of powerful imagination, and a conscientious and learned historian. He wrote an *Histoire Universelle*, which testifies to his profound erudition and to the exaltation of his philosophic outlook. He was a confirmed Calvinist, who from the age of ten had strenuously resisted every effort to induce him to change his faith, and who in the course of his life had been four times condemned to death as a consequence of his Protestant beliefs—which, however, did not prevent him from finally dying tranquilly at Geneva, at the age of seventy-eight. Françoise d'Aubigné's mother was a Catholic; but she never permitted her religion to impair her love for her husband. As for the girl's father, Constant d'Aubigné, he had always made a failure of everything; and consequently, on his release from prison, he was seized with a desire to go abroad, his idea being that in a different land, and under fresh conditions of life, he would be able to do better than he had done in France.

Martinique became the place of his choice; and, accompanied by his family, Constant d'Aubigné arrived at that Island in 1639. Unfortunately his success there was no better than it had been in France; and on his death in 1645 Madame and Mademoiselle d'Aubigné were left in an almost destitute condition.

They were sent back to France, by the aid of charity; but, on their arrival in Paris, their distress grew worse and worse, until a good and compassionate lady, Madame de Villette, an aunt of the late Monsieur d'Aubigné, invited the unfortunate couple to live with her. She was a Calvinist, like the little

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girl and her paternal ancestors, and she longed only for two things—to see the child become strengthened in the religious principles of her fathers, and to assure the happiness of the mother and daughter. The time that Françoise d'Aubigné passed with her Aunt de Villette was the happiest period of her childhood. She always preserved a tender remembrance of her, and never referred to the old lady in any other terms than that of "the good Aunt de Villette". But the "good Aunt de Villette" died, and the difficulties of existence again confronted the mother and daughter in the same terrible manner as before.

They had, however, another aunt in Paris, a Madame de Neuillant, who was very well-to-do, better off in fact than Madame de Villette had been; but she was a hard, close-fisted, selfish woman, and completely indifferent to their sufferings. Public opinion, however, compelled her to appear to interest herself in their lot, and to invite them to come and live with her. Madame d'Aubigné and her daughter gratefully accepted, but from the first day of their arrival they realized clearly how very different her hospitality was going to be from that of Madame de Villette. In her opinion, everything was too good and expensive for the d'Aubignés. They were always in the way, too; and, to crown everything, Madame de Neuillant had determined to impose on Françoise the Catholic religion. Like her grandfather before her, the little girl resisted with all her force this attack upon her religious conscience. She had a will of iron and a very exalted idea as to the value of her own soul and personality—a conception that was to make of her a woman who would be always dignified, even in the most critical hours of her life, but which was also to endow her with an almost unlimited ambition. Once, when she was quite young, she heard someone talking of a girl, who had just made a great marriage, and she interrupted by asking: "And what am I going to do?" As no one replied, she continued: "What I want is to be Queen of Navarre"—and they were certainly prophetic words. Madame de Neuillant, thus, could make no impression on the mind of her niece.

Then it was decided to place the child under the care of the Ursuline nuns; and their attitude towards her was the very



FRANÇOISE D'AUBIGNÉ  
puis Madame Scarron ; puis Marquise de Maintenon



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reverse to that of Madame de Neuillant. They never spoke to Françoise on such subjects as Calvinism and Catholicism. They even advised her not to enter the chapel, especially during the hours of service. But ingeniously, without having the appearance of doing so, they enveloped the little girl in an atmosphere of religious mysticism—the chanting of the canticles, the smell of incense, the mysterious quietude of the chapel when lighted only by the lamp of the tabernacle, the solemn swell of the organ, the glances and pressure of hands trembling with love for Jesus and the desire to bring sheep to the fold; and the reading from Holy Scripture, wherein Christ declares Himself the living fountain that quenches all thirst, or the gentle shepherd that takes into his arms the lamb that cannot walk alone. Gradually Mademoiselle d'Aubigné succumbed to the charms of a religion so much sweeter, more artistic, more attractive, and more moving than the one she had followed up to that moment, and the day came when she begged to be admitted into the Catholic Church. To some friends of hers who desired to know how the Ursuline nuns had managed to persuade her Françoise replied with spirit: "My own power of determination needed no assistance from them".

However, shortly after her conversion Mademoiselle d'Aubigné left the convent to return to Madame de Neuillant's, where she was to meet once more with the mean mode of life and unsympathetic treatment which had formerly been her fate. Madame de Neuillant exacted from her services such as she would scarcely have asked a domestic to perform; and kept her for hours every day employed on tasks of the roughest and heaviest kinds. But, as she desired to get as much credit as possible among her friends for her spurious generosity, she invited the Chevalier de Méré to be so good as to undertake the education of her poor niece in the manners of society; for the recent death of Madame Constant d'Aubigné had left the whole responsibility of the young girl's education and ultimate fate on her hands.

The Chevalier de Méré was regarded by the great world of the time as the personification of good taste. He had the reputation of being able to impart elegance, grace, and wit even to those who had been denied it by nature. It was

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related that the Duchesse de Lesdiguières, who at one time was conspicuously lacking in conversational ability and powers of repartee, had one day said to the Chevalier de Méré: "Chevalier, I do so want to be witty", and that the Chevalier had replied with the utmost composure: "Madame, you shall be so". And the marvellous part of the anecdote was that he had kept his word; for, after his course of lessons, the Duchess had emerged a totally different person, with a felicity of conversation that aroused general admiration.

Such was the man that Madame de Neuillant selected to complete the education of Françoise d'Aubigné. The Chevalier expressed himself enchanted at the request, and went so far as to assure Madame de Neuillant that, as a consequence of her niece's attraction and unfortunate position, he had no intention of charging for the lessons he would give her. Unfortunately Françoise did not reciprocate his admiration. She had already a very distinctive manner of her own in respect to social deportment, method of criticism, general conversation, and display of intelligence. She was, as a matter of fact, greatly appreciated, even adulated, in her aunt's drawing-room, and to such a degree that Madame de Neuillant herself was extremely annoyed that a pauper as she was, dependent as she was entirely on her own charity, should, as often as not, rob her of the social attentions, which otherwise would have been hers. Mademoiselle d'Aubigné had even arrived at the distinction, among this particular set, of being referred to as "la belle Indienne".

Nevertheless "la belle Indienne" had none of the ordinary characteristics of the creole. There was nothing languid or listless about Françoise d'Aubigné. On the contrary, she was activity itself, surcharged with energy, perhaps somewhat severe and cold in appearance, but always most elegant and refined in her every word and gesture. She was also very pretty. She had dark almond-shaped eyes, an oval countenance, teeth beautifully white and regular, gracefully curved lips, a little round chin which later on however was to develop masterfully, soft and silky hair, a perfectly proportioned figure, and exquisitely modelled hands.

No one was more conscious of her poor niece's beauty than

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Madame de Neuillant herself, and it was with the definite object of avoiding further comparison with it that she was determined to get rid of her as quickly as possible by some sort of marriage or other. And it was just at that moment that a sudden opportunity arose such as Madame de Neuillant could only regard as providential. The burlesque poet Scarron, having occasion to write about Martinique, was desirous of finding someone who could give him first-hand information regarding the island. Seeing that Mademoiselle d'Aubigné had lived there for several years, it seemed to Madame de Neuillant that she was clearly the precise person the poet required. Certainly she had been but a child when she left the island, but her aunt had not a doubt that her natural intelligence would easily make up for any deficiency arising out of such cause—and, anyhow, the opportunity was too good to be missed. Scarron, as a matter of fact, was one of the most popular men in Paris. His friends, who belonged to the pleasure-seeking world, were all well-to-do; and he himself, though a hopeless cripple, was full of fun and laughter, and a boon companion. Madame de Neuillant had great hopes that something might develop from this opening, and she had Scarron informed that her niece was in a position to give him most interesting details in respect to Martinique, and would call on him if he so desired. Scarron accepted the offer with enthusiasm, and Mademoiselle d'Aubigné, being despatched to the poet, found herself in the presence of a man whose gaze was bright and penetrating, but who was paralysed up to the waist. Scarron had been in this condition for a long time past, but there had been a time—in the riotous years of his twenties—when he had been greatly admired for his perfect figure and for the graceful way in which he moved. He had been in those days, as he was still, a beneficiary of the Priory of Le Mans—a position compelling him, if not actually to take orders, at least to maintain a certain decorum of manner. Unfortunately Scarron was strongly addicted to pranks of all sorts, and some of the most dare-devil description—a predisposition which rendered the restraint imposed on him by his benefice extremely irksome. Arising out of this idiosyncrasy, he, one year, at carnival time, determined for the moment to ignore his incumbency of the Priory of Le Mans, to enjoy himself



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as he thought fit, and to go as a feathered man. To carry out the idea necessitated his stripping himself of his clothes, smearing himself with pitch, and then rolling in a mass of feathers. The initial result was most gratifying—he looked a more richly plumed bird than the world had ever seen. But, as it happened, the longer he walked about the town of Le Mans, the quicker he moulted ; and, after a promenade of three hours, his original disguise had dwindled down to a few feathers, sparsely scattered about his naked body—and it was precisely at that moment that he perceived several of the clergy of the town coming towards him. Had these gentlemen but seen him in that amazing and undoubtedly questionable condition, Scarron would have assuredly lost his benefice. But how was he to escape them ? Quick as thought, and at his wit's end, with one bound he jumped into the river. It was the middle of January and intensely cold, and the water was rapidly freezing. Scarron at the moment had been very hot, and the effect of the icy shock on his system was so intense that he at once lost consciousness. Some minutes later, when those who had seen him jump in, dragged him out, he lay as dead. For a long time they failed to bring him round. But, in the end, he came back to life—though not to the life he had known before, for half of his body was permanently paralysed.

Thus was it that the man who Mademoiselle d'Aubigné now confronted, was a cripple, whose eyes alone recalled the Scarron of the past. Nevertheless, the young girl was profoundly attracted by him, and he, on his part, little accustomed as he was to the modesty and reserved dignity which was apparent in the beautiful Mademoiselle d'Aubigné, experienced in her presence a feeling such as hitherto had been unknown to him. A deep sense of mutual sympathy was at once aroused, and the next day it grew deeper ; and on the third day he offered to produce for her the sum of money which would be required to enable her to enter the convent of her choice. But Françoise, looking at him straight, told him that it was not a convent that she had chosen, and the tenderness of her glance enabled him to read what she meant. However, he was afraid of being deceived, and the look he gave her openly suggested his doubt and begged for a reply.

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" Yes, I love you ", she said, " and to be your loving and devoted wife would be my greatest happiness ".

The marriage took place a few weeks later. The bride was sixteen-and-a-half, and the husband, who was forty-two, had been a cripple for fourteen years. When Queen Anne of Austria heard of the marriage she exclaimed : " What on earth is Scarron going to do with Mademoiselle d'Aubigné ? There will be less use for her than anything else in the house ". But, to gain his end, Scarron resigned his connection with the Priory, the most certain source of his income, for a beneficiary had not the right to marry. On the day of the signing of the marriage-contract, the notary asked the bridegroom what he was giving to the bride, and, with his characteristic high spirits and unflinching humour, Scarron replied : " I am giving her immortality ".

The young Madame Scarron became a source of constant joy and ever-increasing fascination to her husband. She helped him in his work, and her influence over the writer was of the most beneficial kind : she taught him to temper his wit with good taste, added delicacy of touch to his descriptive art, and induced him to employ more tact when engaged in polemical writing. The *salon* of Scarron was gradually transformed under the sweet but firm influence of his young and attractive wife. She was so dignified and clever and so attentive to everyone—but especially to her " dear cripple "—that not only did all Scarron's old friends continue to crowd to his rooms after his marriage, but they comported themselves in a very different manner from that which they had adopted before. The gaiety and laughter was, if anything, greater and certainly more general, but it was of a different kind.

Madame Scarron became very intimate with Ninon de Lenclos, a very old friend of her husband's ; but the latter lady was most circumspect and discreet when in contact with her new friend. The Maréchal d'Albret, the Comte de Grammont, Madame de la Suze, Madame de la Sablière, the Vendômes, the Scudérys, Pellisson, Ménage, and all the others did their utmost to conceal their easy-going self-indulgence and their epicurean morals under a cloak of witty talk and refinement of manner. Scarron confided to his wife that, before knowing her, he had longed for death, but that now

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his hope was to live to be a hundred. Unfortunately, his desire was far from being realized. After eight-and-a-half years of perfect domestic happiness, the poor cripple was taken from his dearly loved wife, and Madame Scarron found herself a widow at twenty-five with no other possessions than her own beauty and manifold charms.

But her charms, combined with her more serious qualities, were once again to enable her to triumph over the difficulties of life. Many of her husband's friends thought that, now that she was alone in the world and without resources, the young widow might conceivably countenance tempting and questionable advances. Monsieur de Villarceaux, deeply enamoured of her, had even broken with Ninon de Lenclos, whom he had loved for years, in the hopes of gaining Madame Scarron's affections. But Madame Scarron remained proof against all such temptations. Restrained by a strict and positive religion, her great aim was to be respected, and had no concern with sensuous emotions. Such emotions, in fact, appear but rarely and remotely to have disturbed this remarkable woman. So, it was not with the men who had frequented her husband's house that she now sought to be on friendly terms, but with the women. Indeed, it was not long before her company was being eagerly sought after by the women of her acquaintance, for it was found that, as soon as she stayed in a house, she had become indispensable to it. Rising at six o'clock, she had seen and arranged to everything before her hostess had been called in the morning. During the course of the day, she understood so entirely how to pursue her sphere of usefulness that every house she left seemed conscious of a void which only the young widow could fill. In addition to that, Madame Scarron had a gift of conversation of quite exceptional quality. It was, in fact, said of her, that all her coquetry lay in her mind. She was extremely cultured, had read deeply, and had benefited greatly by her intimate contact with Scarron's intellect; and she lost no opportunity of continuing to improve herself.

One day, when Madame Scarron was staying with Madame d'Haudicourt, her hostess spoke of all this to Madame de Montespan, who happened to have called, and who at the time was looking out for a guardian for the children she had

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had by the King. She asked whether she could be introduced to her hostess' wonderful friend, and, so soon as she had set eyes on her, she at once fell under her charm, and then and there asked Madame Scarron whether she would be prepared to take charge of her children. Madame Scarron, though extremely flattered at the proposal, was characteristically prudent in her reply, stating that she would not dare to accept such a position, unless personally appointed by the King—and, on the special request of Madame de Montespan, the King naturally at once made the necessary appointment (1670).

In this way, Madame Scarron became the foster-mother of the Duc du Maine together with his brothers and sisters. Installed at Vaugirard with the children, whose identity had still to be concealed, Madame Scarron behaved in every way admirably. She loved the children as a mother, looked after them as a devoted nurse, and educated them as a woman of genius. Despite the attentions of every description which she lavished on them, she still found time to show herself in society, and even to shine in it ; her object being not to draw such attention to her absence as might have resulted in an exposure of the mystery, in which Louis XIV up to 1673 desired to conceal the existence of the children whom he had had by Madame de Montespan. However, in spite of all the devotion, intelligence, and tact she expended on his behalf Louis XIV was in no way prepossessed by the guardian of his children, whom he considered to be cold and severe. And a visit which Madame de Montespan induced him to make to Vaugirard in no way changed his point of view. In the meantime, Madame de Montespan was getting bored to death by having to read aloud to the King for hours, every day—and in very weariness of spirit she thought of the guardian of her children, and wondered whether she could not possibly shift this, the most irksome of her tasks, on to her shoulders. She at once addressed the King on the subject, and, though Louis XIV protested mildly, Madame Scarron was summoned to the Court as daily Reader to the Monarch. From the very first lines she read Louis XIV was enchanted by her voice, by the art, whereby she brought into emphasis the leading ideas and interesting details and relegated secondary points to their proper place, and by the manner in which she made clear the

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actual meaning of what she was reading. Never had the King been read to, in such a way before ! His enthusiasm became even greater when he discovered that Madame Scarron could explain to him everything he asked, give him all the information he wanted to acquire, and indicate to him the books which should be read to elucidate and complete the subject which was then occupying their attention. So much skill, accompanied by so noble a simplicity, by a charm which was all the more taking for being altogether devoid of pose and by a gracefulness which pervaded her whole personality, overpowered Louis XIV with admiration. He realized for the first time the beauty lurking in Madame Scarron's almond-shaped eyes, her wide and intellectual brow, her little, graceful, rosy mouth and her straight nose so well formed with its delicately curved nostrils denoting strength, distinction, and dignity. Under the influence of so much charm, the King begged the guardian of his children to come and read to him every day. Three months later she received from him the present of the property of Maintenon and the title of Marquise, and she never quitted the Court again till the King's death, save to visit her own estate.

This was the period of Madame de Maintenon's life that is most difficult to analyse. The complicated rôle she plays between Madame de Montespan, the King, their children, and the minor mistresses that flit across the scene is most mysterious and perplexing. One day, in one of those bursts of anger habitual to Madame de Montespan, the official Favourite flung at Madame de Maintenon the taunt : " The King has three mistresses—you, in affection, Fontanges in actuality, and myself in name ". It is quite certain that at this time Louis XIV greatly preferred Madame de Maintenon to Madame de Montespan. The sweetness of Madame de Maintenon, her level temperament, the interesting way in which she talked, her lively manner, her skill in recognizing that everything the King said or did was right—even when, by a conscious exercise of diplomacy, she induced him to say or do exactly the opposite—her advice, so replete with good sense, her foresight and prudence, and her activities in all directions both in respect to men and things, made her as indispensable to Louis XIV as she was attractive. She was the only one of

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all the women Louis XIV loved who had any influence in politics. Such influence, certainly, was never of the lime-light order. Madame de Maintenon, for instance, was never seated on the right of the King when he received the foreign Ambassadors, as some years before the Marquise de Montespan had done in her costumes of "gold upon gold, embroidered with gold". Nevertheless, the influence of Madame de Maintenon was much more real than had ever been that of Madame de Montespan. But a still more significant distinction between the two was the fact that the conduct of Madame de Maintenon remained irreproachable. Louis XIV enjoyed no greater intimacy with the Marquise de Maintenon than had Scarron's friends in the past. "There is no greater achievement than an irreproachable conduct", the Marquise was accustomed to say, and no maxim had a greater influence on her own life than that. If Louis XIV desired a closer intimacy between himself and Madame de Maintenon than that which attached the most obliging and devoted, but also the most conscientious, of his subjects to her King, it was imperative that he should first raise her to his own level. Madame de Maintenon had no intention of lowering herself to suit the King's caprice.

It was just about the time when the King's feelings towards Madame de Maintenon became so imperious and ardent that Queen Marie-Thérèse died (1683). "It is the first distress that she has ever caused me", said Louis XIV, in reference to that poor pious and neglected Queen, who had loved her husband so deeply but had never had the power to attract his love in return. From the moment of her death—possibly with the idea of ridding himself of the distress of mind to which he referred—he began to consider the question of a morganatic marriage with Madame de Maintenon. Madame de Montespan, at the time, was still at the Court, but she was totally discarded by the King. The revelations of La Voisin's accomplices<sup>1</sup> had made him loathe her. He had not dared to order her to leave the Court, because she was the mother of the seven children to whom he was passionately attached. But it was his deepest desire that she should leave; and he had not

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *Dramas Mystérieux—La Voisin and her Associates*.

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addressed a single word to her for the past three years. So it was evident that Madame de Montespan was in no way an obstacle to his contemplated marriage.

There is good reason to believe that the existence of Madame de Montespan's crimes perceptibly contributed to the rise of Madame de Maintenon. Not only had they brought realization to Louis XIV of the danger a mistress might be to a King, but they had robbed his heart of its youth, and had wearied and disgusted him with the errors of his past. From that time forward, Louis XIV, penetrated with a sense of mortification and shame for his own misdeeds, was never again to allow himself to be influenced by a woman unless she were of serious temperament and bound to him by ties that were strictly honourable. It was the personal esteem that he had for Madame de Maintenon, combined with a contempt for mistresses, that Madame de Montespan's conduct had given him that helps to explain the amazing rise of the former Reader and her power over the King's heart.

The obstacle to the union of Louis XIV with the daughter of Théodore-Constant d'Aubigné arose out of his own conception as to the obligations placed upon him by his Kingship. Never had a Prince existed who was more fully convinced as to the nature of the duties imposed on him by a position, which he regarded as divine. It was his exaggerated reverence for his position that induced him to devote his days to long hours of hard work, conscientiously studying all the important questions of his reign. And now, faced with the fact that he was enamoured of a lady proceeding from the minor nobility of France, he questioned whether he had the right to unite her by legal ties to himself, the delegate of God on earth. Would not an union of this almost plebeian blood with his own divinely royal fluid be a positive act of disloyalty to his God and his own Sovereignty? His former mistresses had never had legal association with either his person or his position. It had been solely as a private individual that he had sinned in loving them, and such purely personal faults he considered could be redeemed by a purely personal repentance.

But between himself and Madame de Maintenon the question was one of the divine and legal tie of matrimony—and the thought of it frightened him, and caused him to

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hesitate for two years. But his confessor and high ecclesiastics, who were friends of Madame de Maintenon, dissipated his scruples. The virtues of the lady in question, they assured him, made her superior to women of the highest rank ; and, after all, it would be merely a matter of a morganatic marriage, which would remain undisclosed, and consequently could not offend the susceptibilities of even the most sensitive of his subjects. God would approve, in the same way as He had done in the case of Ahasuerus when he selected the modest Esther—and France would never know. Impressed by such reasoning, the King yielded to the inclination of his heart, and in 1685 Madame de Maintenon became his morganatic wife. Although the marriage had to be kept secret, three or four persons, including her confessor, were accustomed to address her privately as " Your Majesty ".

From the date of her marriage Madame de Maintenon played a more active and prominent rôle in the affairs of the Court than she had previously done. The question has been mooted as to whether Louis XIV acted under her influence when he revoked the Edict of Nantes. It seems curious to attribute the inspiration of such an act to the grand-daughter of Agrippa d'Aubigné—to the individual who had protested with indignation against an attempt to force her to change her own religion. Nevertheless, in 1681 Madame de Maintenon had written : " Should God be pleased to preserve the King, there will not be a Huguenot left in twenty years time ". On the other hand, the fact that this date of 1685 includes both the marriage of Madame de Maintenon and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes suggests that Louis XIV, in love once more and repenting the past, was pleased to offer this act of faith, as a post-nuptial gift to the pious and beloved woman who had just completed his happiness.

But the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes is not the only act of political intolerance that has been attributed to Madame de Maintenon. It is known that the laying-waste of the Palatinate by Louvois, with whom she was in complete sympathy, had her approval. She made no attempt to protect the austere and industrious Jansenists, whose only crime was not to share the faith of their King. And it is even possible that Madame de Maintenon, in agreement with Louis



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XIV, encouraged the Princesse des Ursins in her ambitious schemes.

But her influence on the personality of the King was of the best. She reclaimed him from his licentious mode of life, and restored to him his dignity. She intervened with tact and success in the Royal family quarrels, which were frequent, owing to the rivalry that existed between the Princes of the Blood and the legitimized offspring. "I have just been drawn and quartered, not by four horses, but by four Princes", she said one day, after one of such painful scenes in which she had attempted to play the part of general peace-maker. Her constant preoccupation was to remove every worry from the King that she could, and to take upon her own shoulders the burden of any troubles that beset him. Her great aim in life was to do good, and to induce others to do likewise.

However, it did not take long before such excellence of intention and solicitude to keep away from the Court all trace of contamination had created around Louis XIV and Madame de Maintenon an atmosphere of boredom, austerity, constraint, and in time hypocrisy, especially in respect of religion. Everyone became pious, not out of conviction but merely to please the King and Madame de Maintenon. When there was evening service in the chapel of the Château de Versailles, the church was not large enough to hold the numbers of the faithful; but, one day, when the King and Madame de Maintenon had announced that they would not be able to attend on that particular evening, the officiating priest found himself confronted by a solitary courtier who had not been informed of the King's decision.

Madame de Maintenon was the first to suffer from the conditions which she herself had created; for the boredom of the King in this dreary Court fell especially on her. "What a penance", she exclaimed one day, "to have to amuse a King who is past being amused!" The King's selfish requirements were a source of worry to Madame de Maintenon, as well as his boredom. He could never bear, for instance, anything breaking the long symmetrical lines which he loved to see stretching away in the distance. Such fine discernment on his part may have appeared admirable to Madame de Maintenon, when it was merely a question of the splendid avenues in the

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Park of Versailles or of the lines of the gracious lawns ; but, when it was applied to the actual perspective of her own apartments, it developed into a nuisance. Madame de Maintenon had a great fear of cold, and detested draughts ; and, to protect herself against them, she surrounded herself, when seated, with a tall, circular screen. But the King could not stand the sight of this screen, intercepting the perspective of the room. So, whenever he entered her apartment, the screen had to be removed, and Madame de Maintenon, shivering with cold, had to resign herself "to die from symmetry".

Morning, noon, and night she was at the beck and call of the King. She could not leave Versailles for a single hour without his permission, and often it happened that he gave the permission and then withdrew it before she had had time to take advantage of it. How easy it is for us to understand why Madame de Maintenon declared that the fate of the little peasant-girl of Avon, Jeanne Brindelette, was preferable to her own ! Neither is one astonished to hear that, looking, one day at some tiny fish that had been caught in a neighbouring pond and had been put into a bucket of water, Madame de Maintenon said : " They are like me—they are longing to be back in their old miry haunts ".

Louis XIV, however, gave Madame de Maintenon both time and permission to accomplish a great work—the establishment of Saint-Cyr. It was not instituted all at once. Even in this, her greatest achievement, Madame de Maintenon proceeded cautiously and prudently, step by step, taking no risks. She began by starting a small home for poor girls at Maintenon, and its success encouraged her to open at Noisy a school for a hundred young girls of good family but in impoverished circumstances—and from this Noisy school sprang the idea of Saint-Cyr. Under decree of the 2nd of August, 1686, Louis XIV, at the request of Madame de Maintenon, undertook to maintain the institution of Saint-Cyr, created and organized for the education of two-hundred-and-fifty young girls of the poor nobility. At the conclusion of their education, these young girls were to receive a *dot*, such as would enable them to marry, enter a convent, or become themselves lady-instructresses at Saint-Cyr. Mansard

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decorated the school buildings—Fénelon was appointed its first chaplain—and Racine its Professor of Literature, in which capacity, later on, he wrote for the pupils the tragedies of *Esther* and *Athalie*. All that was best in France had to contribute to the well-being and glory of Saint-Cyr. Its whole organization was excellently designed, but the education it imparted was conceived on different lines from those which had existed before. It was Madame de Maintenon's intention to eradicate that excessive modesty which hesitates to speak freely, and to instruct young girls in matters pertaining to the pitfalls of life. "There is nothing at all in the word *pantalon*", she wrote peremptorily to the instructresses of Saint-Cyr, "to shock any of our girls". Like Boileau, she considered "a cat should be called a cat". She also desired the pupils to be taught that meekness was the most attractive quality in a woman—but meekness of a nature such as is born of self-control, understanding, and activity in the service of others, and not the mere outcome of quiescence and mental sloth. It was also impressed on the pupils that they should take as great an interest in matters concerning the cares of the household as in the acquisition of intellectual attainments; and that the foolish prejudice of regarding cooking and needlework as being an inferior occupation to that of reading was to be strenuously combated. In her system of education Madame de Maintenon gave the highest place to the cultivation of prudence, instructing her young girls that on its due exercise depended the course of their future lives. To be prudent in all things was to her an essential, no matter how unnecessary it might appear to be. "Treat your friends of to-day as though they were to be your enemies of to-morrow", she said in her lectures to the young ladies, and she often emphasized this advice.

Such a method of treating friendship gives us the key to the defective side of the Saint-Cyr system of education. Though there was so much that was perfect at Saint-Cyr, there can be no doubt that reason was cultivated there to the detriment of natural feeling. The higher intelligence was so repressed under all this practical instruction that it could never develop an elevated outlook. It was a curriculum that could never produce impetuosity, enthusiasm, or loftiness of purpose. Louis XIV was quite right when he said, as related

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by Madame du Hausset, "Saint-Cyr is only fitted to produce good tire-women". The hearts of the pupils brought up at Saint-Cyr were not of the quality to arouse the sublime devotion of mothers, the self-sacrifice of patriots, or the altruism that renounces self for the benefit of humanity. Neither were they cognizant of the emotions which produce artists, heroines, and Saints. Brought up in a practical way, the ladies of Saint-Cyr remained practical women who understood exactly how to look after their own affairs and make themselves acceptable to the society in which they lived. Not one of them contributed an iota of romance or distinction to the history of France. Like the autumn of Madame de Maintenon's own life, they were sombre and wise—but devoid of any radiating qualities.

It was to Saint-Cyr that Madame de Maintenon retired on the death of Louis XIV, which occurred in September, 1715. As a matter of fact, she left Versailles before he actually died. Four days before that event, the King was lying unconscious and had been given up by the doctors; and she deemed it prudent to leave the Court of her own accord, to avoid the possibility of her being requested to leave it. Louis XIV, however, recovered consciousness and asked for her, and she immediately came back—but only to depart for the last time a few hours later. From that date she was only indirectly connected with State-affairs. Peter the Great paid her a visit at Saint-Cyr, during his travels in France, in 1717, and it is said that he found her looking very old and ugly. This visit, however, did not constitute the greatest event of the last years of her life—which was the attempt of the Duc and Duchesse de Maine to obtain the Regency of the Kingdom during the minority of the young Louis XV. Madame de Maintenon had had a large share in bringing about the marriage of her favourite pupil with Mademoiselle de Charolais, daughter of the Prince de Condé-Bourbon; and, later on, she had used all her influence over Louis XIV to cause him officially to declare his legitimized sons' right to the throne in the event of there being no legitimate heir. And, also, it was as much due to her as it was to the Duchesse de Maine that Louis XIV was finally induced to make a will in favour of the Duc de Maine. So, when the Parliament declared that will to be void, Madame

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de Maintenon experienced the keenest grief ; and it is highly probable that she thoroughly approved of the Duc de Maine making every possible effort to seize again the power to which his father, the King, had appointed him. But, when such efforts on the part of the Duke, together with the intrigues of his Duchess, had ended in a terrible scandal, and, what is known as the Conspiracy of Cellamare was fully exposed,<sup>1</sup> Madame de Maintenon was seized with terror and despair at the immensity of the misfortune which had befallen the Prince who was so dear to her ; and it is generally understood that the arrest of the Duc de Maine was the cause of her death on the 15th of April, 1719. She was in her eighty-fourth year.

<sup>1</sup> See the last chapter on *La Duchesse de Maine*.

## LA DUCHESSE DE BOURGOGNE

[1685-1712]

Marie-Adélaïde of Savoy, daughter of the Duke Victor-Amédée of Savoy, was born at Turin, on the 6th of December, 1685, and was related to the Royal House before becoming, through her marriage, a "Grand-daughter of France". She was, in fact, the daughter of Anne d'Orléans, the eldest child of the fascinating and clever Henriette d'Angleterre, Duchesse d'Orléans, who was so loved by France, and whose triumphant youth was cut short by death at the early age of twenty-six.<sup>1</sup> If Anne had inherited none of the brilliant qualities of her mother, and has now a place in the memory of posterity solely as a consequence of the sympathy that has been bestowed on her sad life of devoted self-abnegation, Marie-Adélaïde resembled her grandmother, Henriette d'Angleterre, much more than she did either her mother or her father, the harsh Victor-Amédée.

When quite young, Marie-Adélaïde, was only too-well aware of her mother's sadness, and dreamed of France and its Court. So it was an immense joy to her when, on the 14th of October, 1696, it was arranged that she should marry, at the age of eleven, the Duc de Bourgogne, grandson of Louis XIV and the future heir to the throne of France. The Duke was only fifteen, and naturally their marriage, which was to bind Savoy to the French alliance, was for the time being to be only a marriage in name.

It was invested with much pompous ceremonial, and was carried through with a meticulous attention to etiquette, such as nowadays would appear both puerile and amusing. Marie-Adélaïde had to change all her clothes in her coach, half-way across the Beauvoisin Bridge, where lay the frontier between France and Savoy. It was not, in fact, thought right that a Princess whose destiny was to be the wife of a Prince of the

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *Henrietta of England, Duchesse d'Orléans*.

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Royal House of France should enter the country clothed in anything whatsoever that was not of French manufacture. Such divestment of all things foreign was called "the ceremony of transformation". National pride prompted Savoy to insist that the "transformation" of Marie-Adélaïde should take place within her own territory—and France was unable to admit herself less sensitive and exacting than Savoy. And so, to satisfy the pretensions of both countries, it was arranged that Marie-Adélaïde should "transform" herself half-way across the Beauvoisin bridge, the front-wheels of her coach being on French soil while the hind wheels were still in Savoy.

Marie-Adélaïde was thus brought early to the Court of France with the double purpose of familiarizing her with the official life which her high rank would make it obligatory for her to understand, and of continuing there her education. Under the direction of Madame de Lude, her Guardian and Lady of Honour, the Princess had to study orthography—in which, however, she never became very proficient—history, and all such other subjects as at that time Princesses were expected to know. But, as a matter of fact, directly she arrived at the Court of Louis XIV she did almost exactly what she pleased. The King immediately conceived for her the tenderest affection. Marie-Adélaïde's whimsical nature, quick-witted intelligence, vivacity, capriciousness, and happy and unexpected turns of speech fascinated the King, who had become quite unused to fun and laughter since the sedate Madame de Maintenon had set the tone of the Court.

Louis XIV loved the little Princess as a doting grandfather who each day becomes more and more under the sway of a little child. He longed to see her at all times, sending for her to his bedroom when he was ill, and making his way to hers at once, should she perchance be indisposed. They went out together every day, either driving or walking; and often he took her out coursing, which she delighted in; played pall-mall with her; and even acted in little plays to give her pleasure. She was permitted to take liberties with the great King such as no one else would have dared to attempt—like scratching at the King's door when she thought the Council



MARIE ADÉLAÏDE DE SAVOIE  
 Duchesse of Bourgogne





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had lasted long enough, or even opening and reading the Royal letters.

Whether through desire to please the King or through natural inclination, Madame de Maintenon manifested the same tenderness towards the Duchesse de Bourgogne as Louis XIV. To give pleasure to the little Princess, she taught herself to row, and played hide-and-seek; and was of the opinion that no more charming Princess had ever existed. In the hands of these two old people, the Duchess became the spoilt and treasured child, whose caprices, insistent demands, and impertinences are a source of pride and gratification. But she was a very tender-hearted child, who returned to Madame de Maintenon and the King an affection equal to their own. She paid to both of them a delicacy of attention surprising in a child of her age. She called Madame de Maintenon "*ma tante*", and made every effort to please the King and her "Aunt". The Duchesse de Bourgogne may be regarded as the smile that lighted up the last years of Louis XIV, the touch of poetry that softened the end of his reign, the ray of sunlight that fell across the age-worn Court, and the bright and radiant fairy of Versailles.

But this delightful child, who was so courteous and affectionate to the King and Madame de Maintenon, was most difficult to control. Madame de Lude was greatly upset at finding that her authority was powerless to make her work; and Madame, the second wife of the Duc d'Orléans, own grandfather to the Duchess de Bourgogne, wrote in 1698: "When out driving, she never remains a moment in her place—she sits on the knees of anyone who may be in the carriage, jumping about like a little monkey. Everything she does is thought charming. . . . She is absolute mistress in her own room. Sometimes the fancy takes her to get up and run about at five o'clock in the morning. . . . She is permitted to do anything, and everything she does is considered admirable. . . . In the middle of dinner she begins to sing, to dance on her chair, pretending to bow to everybody, and making the most hideous faces, and she tears the chickens and partridges on the dishes to pieces with her hands, and dabbles her fingers in the sauces".

Madame, who was inclined to be severe and who never

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stopped criticizing the Court of Louis XIV, which was in every way so different from her own little Court in Germany, has probably put a spice of exaggeration into her picture, especially when it is remembered that she was by no means partial to the family of her husband by his first wife. None the less, the fact remains that the Duchesse de Bourgogne was an *enfant terrible*, possessing a decided will of her own, and bent on captivating everyone she met by her cajoleries. And, moreover, she succeeded in doing so, till the Marquise de Lude was in despair. Soon, however, a new trouble was added to the worries of the poor Marquise. Not only did she fail to make the Duchess learn her lessons, but she had to maintain the strictest vigilance to prevent the Duke and Duchess from becoming more intimate than the King desired. One day she was even compelled to chase the Duke out of the Duchess' bedroom, and it was no easy task.

However, the Duchess won all hearts by her childish ways and the tender forms of their expression. One day, at a reception of the Ambassadors of Holland, in complete disregard of all etiquette she kissed the Ambassador's daughter because she was looking so sad. Once again, Madame raised her voice against so grave a breach of what was correct, but the whole Court loved the Duchesse de Bourgogne all the more for having noticed that the girl looked unhappy, and for then having delicately attempted to solace her, even though it had been done at the expense of formal etiquette. When she desired to do so, however, the Duchesse de Bourgogne knew exactly how to impose her will, and to put people in their proper places. The incident, when she took upon herself to request a Lorraine Princess to stand behind a French Duchess, at the reception of the English Ambassador: "my Lord Jersey, nephew to Buckingham"—such action on her part being subsequently entirely approved of by Louis XIV—was a case in point.

In the meantime, the Duke and Duchess were growing up. The Duke had just been promoted to the rank of General at the Camp of Compiègne, where he had been in charge of military exercises, similar to what are known to us nowadays as "autumn manœuvres". The Duchess had been present, and had been much interested and stimulated by the experi-

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ence. And, about that time, Louis XIV decided that the moment for the consummation of the formal marriage of 1696 had arrived. He intended that the event should take place at Versailles, the actual seat of his Government. The whole Court threw itself into the matter as though it had been an affair of political importance. Ambassadors reported on it to their Governments, courtiers made it a subject of eager discussion, and the newspapers, the *Mercur de France* and the *Gazette d'Amsterdam* in particular, gave it their attention. Louis XIV himself notified to his grandson the nature of his decision and Madame de Maintenon confided it to the Duchess. The curious thing was that the young couple now showed themselves much more indifferent to the matter than had appeared to be the case when Madame de Lude had had to separate them. The Duchess was now nearly fourteen, and was suffused with modesty ; while the Duke on the other hand was very much in love with his wife, and most anxious not to displease her. Louis XIV definitely fixed the 22nd of October, 1699, for the date in question ; and that evening, when Breteuil went to fetch the Duc de Bourgogne, to lead him to the apartments of Madame la Duchesse, he noticed that he had never before seen the Duke's hair so exquisitely curled nor his general appearance so faultlessly caparisoned.

The Duc de Bourgogne, who at this particular moment was about seventeen-and-a-half, had remarkably beautiful eyes and a wealth of superb hair ; but his mouth was disfigured by prominent teeth ; he suffered from a slight limp ; and one of his shoulders was larger than the other. Morally, the Duke was the production of Fénelon, his tutor. This particular prelate, whose gentleness is so generally extolled was gifted, as a matter of fact, with an inflexible firmness of mind. His mysticism and suavity of speech concealed a tenacity of purpose and a dominating authority which were never allowed to relax. Fénelon, by his powerful individuality, had made his pupil a religious man, endowed with absolute self-control. The Duc de Bourgogne had wisdom, in the evangelical sense of the word. He was essentially a man of conscientious scruples and devoted to his duties, making a careful and laborious study of his future rôle as King, in the

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fear lest he might not be able to fill it to the complete satisfaction of God and his people. Intelligent and hard-working, the Duc de Bourgogne looked forward to loving his Duchess with all his soul, as the one great joy of his life. He had a kind of adoration for her, and was prepared to indulge her in every way.

She still remained the charming, spoilt child of her earlier days. With her essentially impressionable nature, tender and exalted feelings, and vivid intelligence, she had a particular gift of persuading people to think as she did. She was not pretty, but an irresistible charm emanated from her whole personality; and her grace of manner was so easy and unaffected as to induce its counterpart in anyone she might be with. She had every quality to permit of her doing the utmost good—but she was also weak in respect to every temptation. Saint-Simon, in a few lines, has given a masterly delineation of her personal appearance.

“The Duchesse de Bourgogne is not regularly pretty; in reality she is regularly plain—her cheeks lack firmness, her forehead is too prominent, her nose is insignificant, and she has coarse, thick lips; her hair is chestnut, and her eyebrows of the same colour are very well placed; her eyes are the most expressive and beautiful in the world; many of her teeth are missing, and those that remain are decayed, and she does not hesitate to jest about them herself; her complexion is most beautiful, and so is her skin; her neck and shoulders small, but admirably shaped; her throat long, with a suspicion of goitre, which is not unbecoming. She carries her head gallantly, graciously, and majestically, and her whole personality is on similar lines; she has the most expressive of smiles; a tall, slim, rounded, graceful figure, perfectly proportioned, and she walks like a goddess in the skies. . . . She could not be more attractive. Her vivacious laughter and girlish gaiety gave life to everything around her—and her airy lightness, wherever she went, was like a whirl of wind, sweeping along and occupying every corner”.

The Duchess de Bourgogne imagined she loved the Duke quite as much as he loved her, but, as a matter of fact, she received a good deal more than she gave. Nevertheless, the beginning of their married life was a very happy one. The

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Duchess took advantage of so especial an occasion to plunge into pleasures of all kinds with a zeal and an exuberance of spirits that were little short of marvellous. Her animation and gaiety brought about a renewal of youth and enjoyment to the elderly Court of Louis XIV. The carnival of 1700 rivalled those of the first years of the reign, and the Duchesse de Bourgogne was its Queen. She was passionately devoted to dancing, masquerades, riding, cards, and even to gondola parties by night on the Versailles waters. She loved introducing the unexpected and fantastic into her amusements. During the carnival of 1700, everyone in their wish to please the King was desirous of entertaining the young Duchess. There was a ball for her every evening. On Shrove Tuesday she went to three—the first, a *bal masqué*, was given by Monsieur le Duc d'Orléans—the second, by the Duchesse du Maine—and the third, which lasted till five o'clock in the morning, by the Comte d'Armagnac. On leaving the last, the Duchess went to receive the ashes from the hands of her priest ; then returned to have breakfast with her ladies who had been at the masquerade ; and afterwards found time and energy to go at seven o'clock to assist her good Aunt de Maintenon into her carriage, preparatory to her move to Saint-Cyr. Everyone about the Duchess was dropping with fatigue. Madame de Saint-Simon, one of her principal ladies, had had to take to her bed on the preceding Monday ; but the Duchess declared that the carnival had been all too short, and that in the following year she would begin it as early as October.

The habit once acquired, enjoyment became an imperative need to the Duchess. When there were no entertainments in progress, she would betake herself to the little house which the King had given her in the Park of Versailles, called *La Ménagerie*, which was practically a forerunner of *Le Petit Trianon*. There she would ride on her donkey, make cakes, and plan games—but the King did not allow any male to take part in these innocent diversions. The Duchess, however, had other distractions, which proved more fascinating to her even than donkey-riding. She had acquired a passion for cards at the house of her father-in-law, Monseigneur le Dauphin. She played high—especially at Meudon—ombre, brelan,

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reversis, and particularly lansquenet, at which she lost so much money that the King, although disposed to excuse anything she did, was obliged to make his remonstrances.

The Duc de Bourgogne was also pained at the conduct of his dear Adélaïde. During his first campaign, in 1702, she had written to him every day, though she hated writing letters ; and on his return she had gone to wait for him at Madame de Maintenon's, because from her Aunt's windows she could see him coming far away down the avenue. But in 1703, when the Duke was campaigning in Alsace, the Duchess ceased writing to him, except very rarely. Despite his most amorous and urgent letters, which arrived with the utmost regularity, the Duchess handed over to one of her ladies, the Marquise de Montgon, the responsibility of replying to them. It was through her that the Duchess sent her portrait to the Duke, and provided her own blood for the writing of the accompanying note : " in order that he may receive something, really from her ". The potential dangers arising from so indifferent an education as the Duchess had received became very apparent about this time. She thought her husband too serious ; his somewhat severe attitude and rigid devotion to duty frightened her—and she declared that, if of the two she were the first to die, the Duke would certainly marry a Grey Sister or the portress of the Convent of Saint-Marie ; and in this mood, her " wandering " eyes, to which her faithful equerry Tessé refers, began to glance around for someone to distract her.

The Duchesse de Bourgogne had no wish for an intrigue ; but, chafing against her husband's austerity of attitude, and naturally disposed as she was, as a consequence of her vivid imagination and craving for pleasure, to seek excitement in the unexpected and fantastic, all she wanted was an interesting but meaningless flirtation—and her attention was attracted to the Marquis de Nangis, Colonel of the Bourbonnais regiment. He was a nice-looking, discreet young man of one-and-twenty, who had gained some notoriety by his bravery in the campaign of 1701. But at that particular moment, the Marquis happened to be engaged in a *liaison* with the pretty Madame de Vrillière ; and he had no intention of responding to the restive and provocative glances of the

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Duchess. On becoming aware of this, the Duchesse de Bourgogne, with her disconcerting lack of caution, wrote the Marquis a letter in which she clearly disclosed to him her amiable intentions. But, even after the receipt of this letter, the Marquis did not respond in the way the Duchess had hoped ; and, with the purpose of exciting his jealousy, she entered upon a flirtation with the Marquis de Maulevrier, her equerry Tessé's son-in-law. Maulevrier also was an officer of the King, and, like Nangis, had distinguished himself for his bravery. But he was a much cleverer man, of an ambitious and intriguing nature, and he at once saw in the attentions to the Duchess an opening whereby to advance himself personally, though he was by no means unattracted by her. And from that moment the flirtation which she had entered upon only for the specific purpose of exciting the jealousy of the Marquis de Nangis, developed most unpleasantly. Maulevrier took his rôle of lover in the most serious fashion. He overwhelmed the Princess with letters, and she replied to them through the intermediary of her maid, Madame Quantin. He exhibited great jealousy, and one day, after offering her his arm in the Park, he had a terrible scene with her, threatening to challenge Nangis to a duel and to inform the Duc de Bourgogne of the facts. With the idea of attempting to pacify him, the Duchess wrote to him letters of a yet more tender nature, and the situation grew worse and worse, till Tessé, becoming aware of what was happening, obtained for his son-in-law a mission into Spain.

It was about this time that the Duc de Bourgogne returned from Alsace, and in the following year, July, 1704, the Duchess gave birth to an heir to the Throne. Nevertheless, the mutual sympathy existing between the young couple was not yet all that could have been wished. Their difference both of temperament and mentality constituted a definite barrier between them ; and so, when in 1706 the Marquis de Maulevrier returned from Spain, suffering, so it was said, from some cerebral affliction, the Duchesse de Bourgogne was greatly upset. In her trouble, she looked round for a friend and confidant who would bring understanding to the matter, and would give her comfort and encouragement ; and she



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felt that she had found such an individual in the proud and worldly Abbé de Polignac, who was one day to be elected to the Académie Française in the place of Bossuet. Melchior de Polignac was forty-four years old at the time, but the Duchess was not frightened by his age—on the contrary she thought him charming, and particularly intelligent. But, scarcely had he begun to fulfil his functions of gallant and sympathetic confidant, when the tragic death of Maulevrier drew the King's attention to what was going on, and the Abbé was at once despatched to Rome on a special mission. The unfortunate Maulevrier had committed suicide by throwing himself out of a window on the 2nd of April, 1706. The Duchesse de Bourgogne greatly mourned his death, but she shed many more tears on her own account than she did for the deceased. For, as it happened, the Marquise de Maulevrier, who had at once retired to a convent on her husband's death resolutely declined to hand back to the Duchesse de Bourgogne the letters which she had written to the Marquis. Measures of all sorts had to be taken, and the Duchess had the fright of her life, before Madame de Maulevrier ultimately consented to give them up. Possibly the painful experience had a salutary effect, for, though, after this undignified adventure, the Duchess still retained her freedom of manner and speech, at any rate she never again attempted anything so dangerous as flirtation.

In 1707 she gave birth to her second son, after having experienced the grief of losing her first a few months before. In 1708 the Duchess fought valiantly to save the honour and happiness of her husband. That year had brought disaster to the armies of France. The Duke of Marlborough had defeated them at Oudenarde, and Lille had had to capitulate—and the two French Generals of the Campaign were the Duc de Bourgogne, and the Duc de Vendôme. Vendôme openly attributed his defeat to the Duc de Bourgogne, who had, he stated, been lacking in courage and decision. A powerful cabal, composed in the interests of Vendôme, succeeded in gaining over to this point of view Monsieigneur le Dauphin, the Duc de Bourgogne's own father. They met at his place at Meudon, for the purpose of running down the Duc de Bourgogne and re-establishing the reputation of Vendôme—

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and directly the Duke had need for his wife's assistance she behaved altogether admirably. In her defence of her husband she displayed a firmness, skill, courage, and tenacity such as gained for her a complete victory over Vendôme. She even reconciled the father and son, and in a short time many of those who had belonged to the cabal itself were "grovelling before the young Princess". (Saint-Simon.) And she had conducted the Duke's defence wholly unaided; for he, "plunged in prayer and labour, was unconscious as to what was happening on this earth". (Saint-Simon.)

The year following, during the terrible winter of 1709, the Duchesse de Bourgogne devoted her talents and activity to the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor. By depriving herself of her favourite distractions, she was enabled, unknown to anyone, to take entire charge of forty poor people; and it was in this benevolent occupation that her husband surprised her, when he was attempting to discover what the mystery was, to which his Adélaïde was giving so much attention. By these means the character of the Duchess became chastened under the test of trial and affliction. Day by day, her charity and piety drew her more and more into accord with her husband's character, which she was beginning to understand better and to learn to admire. They still viewed things from different angles, but their hearts were growing more akin. Marie-Adélaïde, however, beneath the gradual transformation, retained all her natural charm and characteristic qualities. She did not hesitate to address the King and Madame de Maintenon with the same freedom of speech as she had employed as a little child. "In England", she said to them one day, "the Queens appear to govern better than the Kings. Probably it is because with Queens it is the men who really govern, and with Kings it is the women". And, one day when the Court was full, she had the temerity to allude to the King's marriage with Madame de Maintenon, and also to that of her father-in-law the Grand Dauphin with Mademoiselle Choin—by scornfully interjecting, "Yes, but we make curious marriages in our family".

By this time the Duchesse de Bourgogne was fully equipped for the exalted place which she was ultimately to take at the Court. But there had been nothing to indicate any likelihood

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of change in her present position, when suddenly, on the 9th of April, 1711, Monseigneur le Dauphin, at the age of fifty, was attacked by small-pox, and became seriously ill. Despite all the cares that were lavished on him, he died on the 14th at eleven o'clock in the evening—and the Duke and Duchess became Monsieur le Dauphin, and Madame la Dauphine. There was no general lamentation over the death of the Grand Dauphin, because he had never occupied a leading position in the State and had always appeared to take but little interest in the public welfare. But his successors at once occupied a position of extreme importance in the hopes and affection of the kingdom. It was well known that the new Dauphin was intent on reform, gave all his money to the poor, worked hard, and was a man of superior sagacity; and it was equally well known that the Duchess possessed the spontaneity of decision which the Duke lacked, the gift of quick and accurate prevision, and the desire to love and make herself loved. The country, indeed, was secretly wishing that they were already on the throne. So the people of Paris lavished on the new Dauphin enthusiastic marks of affection on the day when, leaving Notre-Dame on the conclusion of the ceremony for the repose of the soul of the Grand Dauphin, he drove to make his official call on Cardinal de Noailles.

But, while France was prepared to give its love and loyalty to the Dauphin and Dauphine, and to rely on them to repair the disasters of the last years of Louis XIV, a sinister whisper ran throughout the length and breadth of the country—the Dauphine, who had only lately passed her twenty-sixth birthday, was lying dangerously ill. The news was received with a feeling of stupor. It was said that there existed some mystery regarding her malady, and the doctors were at a loss either to check or explain it. Taken ill on the 5th of February, 1712, the Dauphine's case was regarded as hopeless by the 7th; and in the meanwhile, her sufferings were of an agonizing nature. From the first she was possessed by an absolute conviction that she would not recover. Her resignation in the face of death, her piety, her tender attitude towards the King and her husband—who could not be induced to leave her bedside—and towards Madame de Maintenon were all extremely touching. She made full confession, evincing an

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anxiety as to her debts, avowing to her husband all the little weaknesses of her past life, and confiding all her papers to the custody of her good Aunt de Maintenon, in the certainty that in her hands everything would be arranged with justice. But all attempts to save her were in vain, and she died at Versailles, at eight o'clock on the evening of the 12th of February.

The whole of France was overwhelmed at the death of the Dauphine—but a further dreadful blow had yet to fall. On the 13th of February the Dauphin was struck down at Marly by the same disease as had carried off the Duchess. "Oh! my darling Adélaïde!" he cried out, in his own agonies, "how you must have suffered!" He, likewise, died as a Saint and a martyr on the 18th of February, at the age of thirty.

The question has often been raised whether the Duchesse de Bourgogne was not poisoned.

During her short illness the Duchess suffered mainly in her temples, and the agony was so great that she could not, with all her courage, restrain her cries. A contemporary who was at the Court of Versailles at the time has written: "Madame la Duchesse de Bourgogne was uttering such piercing and convulsive screams as to suggest that she was undergoing the torture of being cut to pieces." Such screams were repeated at regular intervals, and always of the same dreadful character. At the same time her face were covered with livid spots. The doctors, the Court, all Paris, and Louis XIV himself accordingly thought that she had been poisoned. Had not the reign borne witness to the terrible doings of La Brinvilliers?—and it was not more than twenty years before, that La Voisin had been burnt alive. Seeing how sudden, strange, and terrible had been her death, it was after all only natural that such suspicion of poisoning should have arisen in the minds of all who had loved the Duchess.

Moreover, only a few days before the Duchess fell ill, her surgeon Boudin had shown her a letter which he had just received, warning him, anonymously, of the existence of designs against the lives of the Duke and Duchess. At about the same time, also, the Duke had received a letter from his

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brother, Philippe V of Spain, conveying the same information. The Duchess, accordingly, when she was attacked, was treated for poisoning. She was given several emetrical doses, subjected to repeated bleedings, and made to drink all kinds of laxatives and antidotes. But the more they doctored her the worse her condition became ; and, as far as she herself was concerned, so absolutely convinced was she that she would not survive, that she submitted to the various treatments that were applied only out of sheer affection for those who loved her. After a lapse into unconsciousness on the part of the dying woman, Madame de Maintenon, who, as was customary with her, had maintained her self-control and whose mind was concentrated on the matter of the soul that was about to pass, whispered with motherly tenderness to the Duchess : " Madame, you are going to God ". The Duchess, whose eyes bespoke her gratitude for being told the truth, replied to her, with a faint smile upon her lips : " Kindly pray, dear Aunt, that I may be received into His bosom ". And, shortly after saying this, she died. The King had started for Marly some hours before, feeling that he had not the strength to be present at his beloved grandchild's death. The Duke had to be torn by force from the bedside of his adored Adélaïde. On the following day, he himself was seized with the same malady, succumbing to it five days later.

This second death only strengthened the belief that they both had died from poisoning. But the post-mortem examinations on the Prince and Princess, conducted by men who had formed their opinion beforehand, did not result in an unanimous decision—the same opinions being maintained after death as had been held during the course of the two maladies. Of the three doctors engaged in the examinations, two—Fagon, Louis XIV's distinguished physician, and Boudin, the Duchess' surgeon—declared for poisoning, while the third, Maréchal, came to the decision that they both died natural deaths.

The mob, which always prefers the extraordinary to the simple and natural, took the side of the doctors who had declared the deaths to be due to poison. Louis XIV, who had been grievously wounded in his tenderest affections, on this occasion was on the side of the mob. Everyone was ponder-

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ing over the question as to who would benefit by these deaths ; and it was remembered that an exquisite casket of chiselled silver, filled with Spanish tobacco, had been presented to the Duchess, who was a great smoker, either on the evening before she had fallen ill or the evening before that—and that it had been presented to her by a friend of the Orléans family. And, further still, it was discovered that the casket in question had disappeared since the Duchess' death. Such reflections and such facts seemed to confirm the suspicions which had at once fallen on the Duc d'Orléans. Moreover, Philippe d'Orléans, though a very clever and well-informed man, had shown himself to be destitute of all scruple, as was evidenced by the shamelessly dissolute life he led. So, when he accompanied his mother, the well-known Princess Palatine, to sprinkle holy water on the body of the Duchesse de Bourgogne, hostile murmurs greeted his arrival, and followed his departure—and much stronger manifestations of hostility were shown towards him by the crowd on the day when the bodies of the Duc de Bourgogne and his Duchess were borne to Saint-Denis, to repose there in the Cathedral by the side of their royal ancestors. At Versailles, the courtiers pretended to be moving elsewhere when he happened to enter the room ; and, though the Duke would attempt to engage several of them in conversation, they only gave him the curtest of replies, and then deliberately turned their backs on him.

But the distrust and ill-feeling aroused by the Duc d'Orléans—who was heir to the Throne of France, in the event of Louis XIV leaving no direct issue—became greatly intensified when the elder son of the Duc de Bourgogne, the little Duc de Bretagne, died with the same suddenness as his father and mother. Even their last-born child, confided to the loving care of his guardian, Madame de Ventadour, fell seriously ill ; and that good woman devoted both day and night in her attempt to save him. She refused to allow anyone to come near the child except herself. She herself tasted everything first before giving it to him, and every night in her devotion she went in person to fetch from a distance the water that the little Prince was to drink—not only secretly, so that no one should know from where she took it, but every night she went to a different place. In short, she exercised

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such vigilance and discretion that the little Prince was saved to fulfil his destiny on the throne of France as Louis XV. But the child's recovery, which had been effected through force of precaution rather than medical treatment, merely further confirmed the Court and public opinion in their belief that Philippe d'Orléans was the perpetrator of the crimes.

Confronted by the conviction of the people, the cold attitude of the King, and the contempt of the courtiers, the Duc d'Orléans at length came to the decision to discuss the matter fully with the King. They had a long interview; and Philippe urged his case with such warmth and simplicity that he finally succeeded in convincing the King of his innocence, and making him regret the suspicions that he had held in respect to his nephew.

Louis XIV was most probably right when he altered his opinion as to the cause of the death of the Duchesse de Bourgogne and her husband, and exonerated the Duc d'Orléans from all suspicion. For the truth of the matter is probably to be found in the conclusion arrived at by Professor Dieulafoy and Doctor Cabanès in their work *Morts mystérieuses de l'Histoire*.

The Duchess was always incredibly imprudent. Neither fatigue, nor a highly irregular mode of life, nor the physical dangers of her surroundings had any influence on her conduct. She always did what she had a desire to do, without ever questioning whether such action might not be detrimental to her health. In addition to this, she lived at Versailles, which, in spite of its beauties, was one of the unhealthiest spots in France. Its swampy soil had been made even more dangerous than it had always been, by the upheavals to which it had been subjected by *le Roi Soleil* in his endeavour to please Madame de Montespan. The autumn of 1711 had been generally injurious to health on account of its extreme humidity, and such adverse climatic conditions had been greatly aggravated by the severity of the winter of 1712. And to this must be added that, for several months before her death, the Duchesse de Bourgogne's health had been anything but satisfactory, as is evidenced by two letters which she wrote at that time to her mother.

Instead of taking greater care of herself, on account of the

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precarious state of her health, the Duchess made no alteration in her mode of life. She devoted herself with her customary indiscretion to the pleasures of the table, of which she was so *inordinately fond that on many occasions her excesses made her seriously ill*. Louis XIV's table, moreover, was maintained on such a luxurious scale that it must have been very difficult for anyone sharing in its plenteous hospitality not to overstep the ordinary rules of hygiene. At nine o'clock in the morning large bowls of chocolate appeared, accompanied by buttered or spiced cakes ; at eleven there was a light repast of sweetmeats and sugared trifles ; two o'clock was the dinner-hour, a meal of gargantuan proportions ; at four, there were light refreshments ; at nine, supper was served ; and at midnight there was the "*médianoche*", the name given to the first meal permissible "after fasting". This long succession of repasts, however, did not prevent every member of the Royal Family having, on a table beside their beds, what was called an "*en cas*"—a stand-by, as it were, for the requirements of the night. Such "*en cas*" were composed of cold meats and delicate wines—and generally speaking, nothing remained of them in the morning. It has been stated that, if Louis XIV's "*en cas*" was not completely finished by the King during the night, his faithful courtiers were gravely disturbed in the morning, for it clearly proved that His Majesty was not well. The Duchesse de Bourgogne, also, was extremely partial to her "*en cas*"; and, in the opinion of Professor Dieulafoy and Doctor Cabanès, such a habit was most prejudicial to her health.

The Duchess was, then, in a very questionable state of health, when a fierce epidemic of scarlet fever broke out in Paris, which rapidly spread over France, and was particularly severe at Versailles, where the nature of the soil was favourable to the propagation of infection. But when the Duchess, whose low state of health and general mode of life indicated her as being a most likely victim of the complaint, fell ill, no one regarded it as scarlet fever, because they had at once all made up their minds that her life had been deliberately assailed by those who had an interest in so doing. Accordingly she was bled as though she had been poisoned, and such treatment, under the circumstances, was the most irrational that



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could have been given her. These various facts account quite simply for the death of the Duchess, no matter how sensational and unexpected it may have been. And, as for the disappearance of the silver casket, probably as a consequence of its value, it was stolen in the general confusion that supervened on the death of this greatly loved and deeply regretted Princess.

# LA DUCHESSE DU MAINE

[1676-1753]

## AND THE DEATH OF LOUIS XIV

[1715]

When Louise-Bénédicté de Bourbon-Condé, grand-daughter of the Great Condé, married Louis Alexandre, Duc du Maine, legitimized son of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan, it was an occasion of great festivity. The ceremony took place with all imaginable splendour in the Chapel Royal of Versailles on the 19th of March, 1692, every member of the Royal Family being present. The King had called on Monsieur le Prince de Condé, in person, to obtain the hand of his daughter, Mademoiselle de Charolais, for the son to whom he was so devoted. On the evening of the wedding the *chemise* was offered both to the bride and bridegroom with the same ceremonial as was in use for Kings and the sons of Kings. The young bride, who was not quite fifteen-and-a-half, was eagerly anxious for all the honours that were rendered her ; but, whatsoever might have been offered to her in this respect, she would have considered, that still more was due to a descendant of the Condés.

The new Duchess was a tiny little person. Saint-Simon definitely states that she never exceeded the ordinary height of a child of ten. At the first glance, she produced the impression of a fair doll with china-blue eyes. On studying her more closely, however, it became apparent that this doll had a very alert and expressive physiognomy, a penetrating glance, and a malicious mouth. But her cheeks, covered thickly with rouge, were too fat, her teeth irregular, her figure ill-proportioned, and she had not the complete use of her right arm. But, despite all this, her little personality was replete with charm, and she could make herself very attractive when she desired to do so. She had a will of iron, and it was the dominating factor of her life. Such obstinacy of character, however, which from her infancy had been the dread of those in immediate

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contact with her, was under the sway of her capricious instincts, violent feeling, unequal temper, and immeasurable vanity. At a later date, Rose de Launay, the most intimate and intelligent of her secretaries, wrote: "Madame la Duchesse du Maine believes in herself as she believes in God or in Descartes—that is to say, in a manner which obviates all necessity for inquiry and discussion. It is impossible to have any conversation with her. All she requires is to be listened to". Rose de Launay ought to have said, if she had told the exact truth, that Madame du Maine believed much more in herself than in God—for her religion was of the vaguest sort, confining itself to certain traditional practices but ignoring wholly its vital truths. The only fundamental belief that the Duchess really possessed was that the Granddaughter of the Great Condé merited at least the second, if not the first, place in the State, and that she intended to get it. To aid her in her immense ambition, this descendant of the Condés was equipped with a tremendous opinion of her own importance, coupled with an active, alert, quick-witted intelligence, which had been developed from her earliest days by a very careful course of instruction. The services of La Bruyère and Sauveur had been employed to give her a cultured mind; and, throughout her whole life, the Duchess herself continued the process. Her aim was to rule as Queen over a world of wit. But she, nevertheless, had a frivolous and superficial side to her character. With her feverish temperament, as passionately eager for pleasure as for honour and glory, and her quick impatience at all suggestions of restraint or superiority to herself, she was alternately charming and hateful. When she was excited by anger or pride she became the latter, but when it was a question of merriment, laughable ideas as to new amusements, dazzling flashes of wit, brilliant efforts of imagination, and spontaneity of invention such as bordered on genius, she became the former, and captivated everyone.

Beside this flaunting, arrogant, turbulent, pleasure-loving young woman, the Duke, who was six years older, presented a startling contrast. He was by nature grave and austere, and his excessive reserve effectually prevented him from ever unbending, save to a very moderate extent. Brought up by



LOUISE-BÉNÉDICTE DE BOURBON-CONDÉ  
Duchesse du Maine



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Madame de Maintenon, who loved him as a most tender and devoted mother, the Duke had been taught by her to regard religion as the principal thing in life. As a consequence, he was exceedingly pious, and in religious observances he found his joys and consolations. The noisy, dissipated world in which he had to live was repellent to him. However, he was not lacking in personal attractions. In spite of a slight limp, his physique was pleasing. His face was long and delicate and of a marked distinction, and his manners were those of a Prince of the Blood—with a polished and correct mode of speech, an exquisite politeness, an acute punctiliousness as to any promises he might have made, and a dignified reserve that did not permit of familiarity. He possessed also that exceptional style and tone, a combination of intelligence, character, power of observation, and originality, that was called "the spirit of the Mortemarts". But, just as the Duchess was so unhesitatingly self-confident, so was he to a similar extent diffident and distrustful of his own powers. Such self-distrust was, later on, to deceive Saint-Simon as to the true character of the Duc du Maine, and to cause that incorrigible chatterer to dub the Prince a hypocrite.

During the first years of his married life the Duke did his utmost to preserve the domestic peace. His wife's outbursts of temper were dreadful to him, and nothing could have been more antipathetic to his pacific nature than a life of continuous discord. However, all those who had had his welfare at heart had ardently desired the marriage—in fact, everyone on both sides had done their utmost to bring it about. To begin with, there was Monsieur le Prince, who, having failed to obtain the Grand Dauphin for his daughter, was nevertheless determined that she should marry a son of Louis XIV; for he felt certain that the legitimized offspring would one day be granted the same rights as the issue of Queen Marie-Thérèse. And then there was Madame de Maintenon, who was as ambitious on behalf of her former pupil as though he had been her own son. She was, accordingly, very anxious for him to marry a Princess, and Mademoiselle de Charolais was the nearest Princess there was to the throne of France. And, finally, there was the King, who, gained over by Madame de Maintenon, argued that to unite his legitimized son in marriage

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with the Royal House was to bring him nearer to actual legitimacy. In such manner, both interest and affection had joined forces to bring about this keenly desired marriage between a most peace-loving Prince and a most turbulent and ambitious Princess.

From the very first, the Duchess determined to metamorphose her husband's life. They were living at that time at Versailles, in a suite of apartments placed at their disposal by the King. Louis XIV loved to have around him the highest and the best, and nothing pleased him more than to have his own children about him at Court. But the life of the courtier carried with it a necessity for restraint, obedience, and inactivity which was extremely galling to the Duchess. Moreover, she had no intention of even appearing to knuckle under to anyone. But she could be feline and subtle when the occasion demanded, and by dint of cajolery she had but little difficulty in inducing the Duke to consent to leave Versailles and in obtaining permission from the King for them to live in the exquisite Château de Clagny, which Madame de Montespan was only too delighted to place at their disposal. Such kindness, however, on the part of Madame de Montespan did not prevent the Duchesse du Maine from combining with Madame de Maintenon to set the Duke against his mother. The child, who had written from Bagnères-de-Bigorre in the tenderest manner to Madame de Montespan, calling her "*ma belle Madame*", was in her disgrace to become hard and insensible to the past. Gradually, however, Madame de Maintenon was compelled to recognize the Duchess du Maine's coldness of heart. On the 27th of August, 1693, she wrote to her niece, Madame de Caylus: "The Duchesse du Maine is capricious, snappish, and unmanageable. Monseigneur le Duc finds her temperament extremely trying".

The Duke, in fact, did not dare oppose his wife for fear of irritating her nerves, and by so doing provoking outbreaks of violence, akin to fits of madness, such as greatly frightened him. Under the influence of this fear, the Duke got into the habit of yielding to the Duchess in all things, and of leaving her undisputed mistress of her own conduct. When it became impossible for the young couple to continue living any longer at Clagny, the Duc du Maine followed the Duchess to the

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house of Nicolas de Malézieu, who had formerly been private tutor to the Duke, but was now the Duchess' secretary, and was able to offer his guest a princely hospitality. It was in his house that their second son, the Prince de Dombes, was born, on the 4th of March, 1700. The elder child had lived only three years (1695-1698). During her stay with Nicholas de Malézieu, at Chatenay, she was trying to find a domain where beauty and luxury could be developed, so as to rival Chantilly, or, for a matter of that, even to exceed it. The immense fortune of her husband had exalted her pride and ambition to such a pitch as to induce her to imagine that she would be in a position to constitute in a domain, such as she sought, a Court which would suggest that of Versailles. And it was in 1699 that the Duchess at last found what she had been looking for; and the Duke, with the object of pleasing his wife, at once purchased it.

The residence on which the Duchesse du Maine's choice had finally fallen had belonged to Colbert and his son, the Marquis de Seignelay—the domain of Sceaux; and its house was certainly the most beautiful abode in the vicinity of Paris. But, however beautiful the property may have been, the Duchess devoted a further five years to enlarging, decorating, and making it perfect. The genius of Mansard and Le Nôtre, in the last years of their lives, was dedicated to this work. Under their direction, Sceaux was converted into a fairy-palace, with exquisite gardens adorned with fountains without number, beautifully carved marble vases, and mythological statuary. There was a succession of superb reception-rooms, each vying with the others in the matter of decoration; a "Pavilion of the Dawn", where the first rays of the coming day broke in such a harmony of light and colour that even the most prosaic poets were inspired—and, *mirabile dictu*, an apology for a lift! The Duchess watched with rapture the gradual realization of her dreams. Sceaux was to be a Realm of Enchantment—and she was to be its undisputed Queen! Even her husband would not be in a position to affect the omnipotence of her sway; for he was to be but rarely at Sceaux, the Duchess now having come to the conclusion that it would be much better for the Duke to remain in contact with the King, in order to foster the cause of the legitimized



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Princes, for whom she intended to obtain, in default of legal issue, the same rights as had the descendants of Marie-Thérèse.

But such a result, which had been her aim from the first days of her marriage, could be effected only by damaging the members of the Orléans family in the eyes of the King ; and, to do this, it was necessary that the Duc du Maine should be in close contact with Louis XIV, that is to say, live at the Court, give the closest attention to all that happened there, and make capital of every little incident that could be turned to the detriment of the Orléans family, whom the Duchess cordially detested. In a word, the Duchess intended her husband to adopt the attitude of an intriguing courtier, a rôle for which nature had never intended him. She, herself, could have played such part infinitely better than her husband, at any rate so far as intriguing was concerned ; but she had no intention of taking the burden on her own shoulders when she had a husband to do it for her, and with the pleasing prospect in front of her of receiving the adulation of a kingdom such as she had created. The Duchess, moreover, realized in her inner consciousness that, should the occasion demand it, she would at once intervene to give her husband every assistance ; but she was not going to do so, to take on herself the servile attitude of the intriguing courtier, until it became absolutely necessary. In addition to this, as she peremptorily pointed out to him, the Duc du Maine, in his capacity of Grand Master of the Artillery, had necessarily to be in immediate contact with the King. In such way Madame du Maine arranged to remain sole mistress of Sceaux. The Duke would pay her occasional and hurried visits, but he was to have no voice whatever in the control of the establishment.

She definitely took up her abode there in 1704 ; and then began a round of fairylike entertainments, superb fireworks, sumptuous dances, unique dinner-parties, theatrical performances of all sorts, and, in particular, tournaments of wit, in which the Duchesse du Maine always came out the victor. Sceaux at once became the resort of the intellectual world, including great nobles, savants, and men-of-letters. Among the former were to be met Louis III, Duc de Bourbon-Condé, the Duc de Nevers, the Duc de la Force, the Comte d'Harcourt,

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and the Duke of Albemarle, the natural son of James II of England. By the side of these men of high lineage were women of equal birth—Mademoiselle d'Enghien, the Duchesse de Nevers, nicknamed "La Belle Diane", whose appreciation of a good table was known to all her set, the Duchesses de Lauzun, de Rohan, de La Feuillade and, in fact, everybody capable of adding fun and laughter to the general atmosphere of animation. Nicholas Malézieu, who had been elected to the Academy, was in the first rank of the men-of-letters who frequented Sceaux. There were to be met Voltaire, Fontenelle, Genest, who were all likewise Academicians, President Hénault, de Mesme, La Fare, Chaulieu, Saint-Aulaire, and a great many others who made a stir at the time but are nowadays somewhat forgotten. Numerous musicians also visited Sceaux. Mouret gave in the Duchess' salon at the Arsenal the first recorded performance of chamber-music; and its success was so great that it was soon afterwards introduced at Sceaux. In this realm of pleasure, art, and wit, everybody competed against one another in respect to brilliancy, refinement, and originality; and it was considered that more ease and freedom would permeate the whole assembly if everyone were to adopt a fancy name—and this was accordingly done. The mistress of the house became Ladovise; the Duc du Maine, who had but little to do at Sceaux, was nicknamed "*le garçon*"; and her sons, "*les garçonnets*". As Fontenelle has written: "At Sceaux there was no respite to our enjoyment, and the whole place rippled with wit". The Duchesse du Maine intended that it should be so, and to such purpose that every day she challenged a new adversary to a literary duel, wherein it was understood that anyone who did not play up to her own high level would incur her displeasure. Her "*bêtes*", as she called her guests, had not the right to let their talents lie idle. The Duchess' view was that they should be always in a state of changing activity, and to encourage the process she invented literary lotteries. The procedure was quite simple—but the result was liable to cause dismay. The Duchess, or her deputy, drew at hazard a letter of the alphabet; and such letter denoted the nature of the composition that had to be put in hand. If, for instance, it chanced to be the letter "O", it signified that an Opera had to

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be written ; if, on the other hand, it was an " F ", it meant that a mere Fable would suffice ; but all the guests had to play the game, and everyone had to produce the special work allotted to him. To decline to write anything would have been a certain method of getting into the black books of Ladovise.

This most exacting of hostesses, however, had by no means exhausted her powers of invention. In order to enhance her authority over her "*bêtes*", she decided to organize them into a definite confraternity. She, therefore, set to work to create an Order, the regulations of which, cleverly drawn up by herself, would give her an unquestioned prerogative over all her guests—it was designated the Order of the Honey-Bee. The device of the Order, which was engraved beneath its emblem of a honey-bee, was : " She is small, but knows how to sting ". Considering the size of the Duchesse du Maine, there was a distinct flavour of humour about the device. The constitution of the Order was a society parody of chivalry. Ladovise was its undisputed and absolute Queen. She presided over all the meetings, seated on a throne, encircled by blue velvet hangings. It was she who decided who were the elect of either sex to be admitted into the Order. When a new member was invested, that is to say, made a Knight of the Order of the Honey Bee, he had to bend the knee before the throne of Ladovise ; and, while he was performing this ceremonial, the Queen was getting ready to receive from him the necessary oaths of allegiance to the Order. These oaths were sworn in the name of the inviolable Attic Mountain of Hymettus, so celebrated for its honey, and were addressed to the Great Fairy, Ladovise, Sovereign of the Order. By these oaths the initiate bound himself to attend the meetings of the Order whensoever he might be summoned to do so ; and he swore to show courtesy to all Honey-Bees, to love amusement and dancing, and carefully to cherish the medal bearing the effigy of the Duchess, and the words " Louise, Baronne de Sceaux, Life-Directrix of the Order of the Honey-Bee ".

The oaths once taken, Ladovise passed over the head of the new Knight a lemon-coloured ribbon, the badge of his dignity, on which was suspended the medal bearing the effigy of the Duchesse du Maine. This ribbon symbolized the indissoluble

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bond that existed between Ladovise and those she had selected as her faithful supporters in all her pleasures. To wear this ribbon—to be a Knight of the Honey-Bee—soon became the one ambition of all who visited at Sceaux. But the Duchess gave evidence of great care in respect to the choosing of her Knights, and had no intention of allowing herself to be influenced in her choice either by rank or by wealth. In this way, her attention having been drawn to the point by her Secretary Rose de Launay, she admitted the lawyer Romanet into the Order in preference to the Comtesses d'Uzès and de Brassac. On evenings of Investiture, Madame la Duchesse held a reception at Sceaux; at other times she gave fancy-dress dinners of the liveliest description, and occasionally one of her "*grandes nuits*", when the entire park was artificially illuminated, dancing continued throughout the night, and verse written in the yoke-elm arbours. The Duchess had an adoration for verse. "Bring me some poems" she would repeatedly exclaim, "or I shall die!" It is, however, unlikely that she ever displayed more enthusiasm for the pasquinade than she did in the case of the one composed by Nicolas de Malézieu, for the purpose of retaliating on behalf of the Duc du Maine for the rebuff he had received at the hands of the French Academy. This rebuff was one of the rare disappointments of the Duchesse du Maine, at this particular period of her life—a period, too, when she was riding roughshod over everybody, and especially her poor "*bêtes de Sceaux*".

But the triumphs of Sceaux did not prevent the Duchesse du Maine from keeping a careful eye on Versailles. The King was ageing; and growing more feeble every day. He had been overwhelmed by the misfortunes of the War of the Spanish Succession—Ramilies, Oudenarde, Malplaquet. Many of his descendants had died sudden deaths—the Grand Dauphin, in April, 1711, the Duchesse de Bourgogne, daughter-in-law of the Dauphin, on the 7th of February, 1712,<sup>1</sup> and the Duc de Bourgogne, the new Dauphin upon the death of his father on the 18th of February of the same year. Poverty afflicted the people, and frightened the King, who was apprehensive, in respect both to his subjects and to the dynasty;

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on *La Duchesse de Bourgogne*.

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and the Duchesse du Maine felt that the moment was opportune for the realization of her ambitious dreams. She determined to wheedle the old King into decreeing an entire effacement of the illegitimacy of her husband, and to begin to be friends with her *bête noire*, Madame du Maintenon, who could be so easily aroused in the cause of the Duc du Maine. With the purpose of obtaining more money to be employed in this cause, she had not hesitated, in 1709, to bring notorious law-suits against her own brother, as a consequence of the will of Monsieur le Prince having benefited Condé at the expense of his sisters.

The Duchess, who had hitherto been so impatient of all restraint, now began to pay an assiduous court, often of a most irksome character, to the old King. In this manner she obtained for her husband a series of honours and appointments. But it did not suffice her. What she wanted was that he should be raised to the dignity of premier Prince of the Blood. Louis XIV hesitated. He was apprehensive how such a step would be viewed by the Court and the highest representatives of the nobility; in addition to which he realized that it would be morally wrong to bring his illegitimate sons into direct conflict with the Princes of the Blood of the collateral branches. However, the Duchesse du Maine, supported by Madame de Maintenon, redoubled her efforts, and in July, 1714, a declaration was extracted from Louis XIV wherein he officially accorded to the legitimized Princes the right of succession to the Throne in default of direct legitimate heirs. The Duchesse du Maine had almost gained her end. All that now remained for her to effect was to get her husband designated as Regent, in the place of Philippe d'Orléans; and, biding her time, she did her best to encourage the terrible suspicions of having poisoned the late Dauphin and Dauphine, which were still being circulated against the Duc d'Orléans. However, the King had no intentions of going beyond a certain point, and he refused to modify the order which gave, on his death, the Regency to Philippe d'Orléans. The Duchess became more subtly ingratiating, coaxing, and affectionate—but to no effect. The King continued firm in his refusal; but on the 2nd of August, 1714, at the instigation of Madame de Maintenon, Louis XIV consented to make his will.

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In this will the King, under the influence of those around him and of the especial affection he had always felt for this particular son, gave to the Duc du Maine, firstly "the command of the Household Troops", and, secondly, "the custody, care, and education of the successor to the Throne".

Its effect was to deprive Philippe d'Orléans of all rights over the person and education of the young King, but to leave him the Regency. Neither the Duchesse du Maine nor even Madame de Maintenon knew exactly what the will contained. The Duc du Maine was given the opportunity of reading it, conditional on his swearing to the King not to divulge its contents to anyone, including the Duchess. But this offer he deemed it wise to decline, and a few days later, during a *tête-à-tête* he had with his father in the King's cabinet, his usual charm of manner was sufficient to gain for him the intelligence that he had been greatly benefited under the terms of the will, but that he had not been appointed Regent. However, when, on the 27th of August, 1714, Louis XIV handed this will to Président de Mesme and to the Duc d'Aguesseau, for the purpose of having it deposited in the safe custody of the Parliament, he must have had doubts as to whether he had not done too much for the Duc du Maine, for he said: "They have insisted—worried me—given me no peace. There it is—carry it away—it must take its chance".

Louis XIV foresaw that his will, like those of his predecessors, would not be respected. But the Duchesse du Maine for her part believed that the last wishes of the great King would be upheld; and accordingly she sought up to the end to make them coincide with her own. Even on the very day of Louis XIV's death she was still taking measures to attain her end; for, when the King seemed to be dying without having done what she required, she had recourse to a herbalist to give him a draught, in the hopes of prolonging his life and strength for a few more hours. The King took the draught, and experienced some relief; but he made no change in his will (1st of September, 1715).

The grief of the Duchesse du Maine over the death of Louis XIV was extreme. With him had died her aspirations and sole support, as was cruelly demonstrated to her on the

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following 15th of September, when the Parliament, despite the opposition of its President, Monsieur de Mesme, abrogated the will of Louis XIV, and granted to Philippe d'Orléans all the powers pertaining to an absolute and sovereign Regency. The Parliament left to the Duc du Maine merely the empty title of Surintendant, but deprived him of all authority over the King and the Household. The Duc de Bourbon, her own nephew, became Grand Master of the Royal Household and Guardian of the little King.

Thus all the intrigues, endeavours, and self-restraints of the Duchesse du Maine had resulted merely in recognition having been granted to her husband and his descendants in respect to their "competency to succeed to the Throne". It was next to nothing, considering what she had aimed at. So she relieved her feelings by retaliating on Philippe d'Orléans with all the concentrated venom of her nature. Her "*bêtes*" gave her every assistance in launching against the Regent a continuous stream of violent and spiteful "philippics", in which, despite all his libertine vices, Philippe d'Orléans was depicted a hundred times worse than he really was. In addition to his immoralities of the usual kind, the "philippics" stigmatized him as "poisoner, and corrupter of the domestic hearth". However, in spite of such attacks the peaceful authority of the Regent was not contested, though he, on his side, continued to undermine the prerogatives of the Duc du Maine. At the beginning of 1717 the Regency Council deprived him of all the prerogatives pertaining to a Prince of the Blood, and declared both him and his heirs to be "incompetent to succeed to the Throne". This was the last straw to the Duchesse du Maine, the end of all her labours, the destruction of all her schemes. But she rose to the occasion, quivering with rage and resolute in her fixed intention to retaliate. "When one has once acquired the right to succeed to the Throne", she exclaimed, "rather than to allow oneself tamely to submit to being deprived of it, it were better to set fire to every corner of the kingdom". And it was exactly that which she had in her mind to do. But from that moment she hated the husband who had brought her to such humiliation equally with Philippe d'Orléans, who had actually caused it, and she flung at the poor dismantled Duc du Maine the odiously con-

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temptuous sentence : " There remains to me, then, nothing, but the shame of having married you ".

The Duchesse du Maine had only too good an opportunity to put into execution her threat to set light to every corner of the kingdom. Spain, in fact, was counting on the Regency to enable it to intervene in the affairs of France. Philippe V, Louis XV's uncle, had every intention of forgetting the formal renunciation under which he had promised never to meddle with the internal affairs of France after becoming King of Spain. His wife, the ambitious Elizabeth Farnese, went further and advocated his playing an active rôle in France. Their minister, Albéroni, a man of enterprise but of fantastic conception, had sworn that his master should be the real Regent during the minority of Louis XV ; whence his activity at the Court of Madrid to find allies willing to assist the Spanish Government. His scheme was :

1. To seize Philippe d'Orléans, and incarcerate him at Burgos ;

2. To excite Languedoc to revolt, and to garrison it with Spanish troops ;

3. To convoke the assembly of the " Etats-généraux ", with a view to their ratifying everything that Philippe V should do ;

4. To give full powers to the Parliament to enable it to render null and void its repudiation of the last wishes of Louis XIV, and to declare Philippe V as Regent of France.

Naturally Philippe V would not be in a position to settle in France and to take up the Regency in person. It became, therefore, a certainty that he would have to appoint a Deputy to take his place ; and did not everything point to the fact that such Deputy would be the Duc du Maine ? Consequently, having regard to the character and ambition of the Duchesse du Maine and to the state of mind into which she had been thrown by her successive disappointments, it is scarcely a matter for surprise that she accepted, with enthusiasm and without the slightest suggestion of discretion, the advances which Cellamare, the Spanish Ambassador in Paris, made to her, first indirectly and afterwards in person. The Duchesse du Maine was a born conspirator, throwing herself joyfully into the scheme with all the energy and ardour of her nature.



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She was splendidly equipped for the purpose : her magnificent entertainments at Sceaux, her love of disguise, the quantity of friends she made through her royal hospitality, her incredible energy, her daring courage, and in fact everything, including the facility she had in writing and speaking, was utilized in furtherance of the cause. She gained many of the nobles over to her side, being in a position to convince them that what was advantageous to herself was equally advantageous to them, at least to such of them as were not dukes and peers. She excited a spirit of revolt in the whole of Brittany, and in all probability would have contrived to have given the Government very serious trouble indeed, had not her activities been paralleled by her own imprudence.

The Duchesse du Maine was even so imprudent as to write to Cellamare and to Spain without taking the precaution to write in cipher. She openly confided in everyone she met, and received the conspirators without any attempt at concealment. In the meantime the Duke was shaking in his shoes. His wife's schemes and indiscretions were preying on his mind, and the foreign alliance was a veritable nightmare to him ; but he had not the courage to oppose her enthusiasm and fixed determination. Besides, the prospect of being Regent of France on behalf of Philippe V was too flattering a one to permit of the Duke deliberately suppressing the very machinations from which such power would be derived. He therefore let things take their course, experiencing, no doubt, grave anxiety, but also pleasant anticipation in the likelihood of obtaining the eagerly longed-for result.

The vigilance and perspicacity of the Regent's Minister, however, gave a very unexpected turn to the development of the plot. This Minister Dubois was an astute statesman, who was devoid of prejudice—but also of morality. He was quite aware that Spain, Cellamare, the Maine Family, Brittany, and many of the nobles were engaged in a conspiracy against the Regency ; but he had no actual proof, and what he needed was some definite clue that would give him an indication as to what was going on, and thus enable him to arrive exactly at the truth. And such clue was furnished to him by a woman named La Fillon, whom he and many others were accustomed to visit. This woman was very devoted to Dubois, and one

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day informed him that one of her lovers had been very late in coming to see her, owing to delay in the despatch of correspondence to Spain. She was also in a position to tell the Minister the hour at which the mail had started, and who was in charge of it. This information was amply sufficient to cause Dubois at once to send in hot pursuit after the Spanish couriers, and to capture the mail. The manœuvre succeeded admirably. Dubois reported to the Regency Council everything that had taken place on the 9th of December, 1718, and had Cellamare at once arrested and conducted to the frontier. As to the Duc and Duchesse du Maine, he had no mercy on them, but ruthlessly published the letters which the Duchess had written to Spain. This publication provoked a cry of fury from the Spanish Court, a clamour to revolt in Brittany, and a great burst of laughter in Paris. But its ultimate consequence was the arrest and imprisonment of the Duc and Duchesse du Maine (December, 1718). The Duchess was incarcerated at Dijon, and the Duke at the For-l'Evêque. On the day after his imprisonment, he wrote to his sister: "I ought not to be put in prison—I ought to be deprived of my clothes, and garbed as a postulant monk, for having allowed myself to be so exploited by my wife".

As to the Duchess, who had spent the last night of her liberty with her secretary, Rose de Launay, looking through her papers, she received the Duc d'Ancenis, who came to arrest her, with all the more fury because on the very evening before he had been one of her own guests. After entering upon her imprisonment, she adopted and maintained the attitude of a dethroned Queen.

Madame de Maintenon died from the shock caused by the incarceration of the Duc du Maine on the 15th of April, 1719.

The Duc and Duchesse du Maine never recovered from the blow dealt them by the Cellamare conspiracy. History loses sight of them from that moment. The Duke was pardoned on the 29th of December, 1719; but did not return to his wife. She also left prison on the same day. In the summer of 1720 she begged for an interview with the Duke, which he accorded her at Vaugirard on the 29th of July, 1720; but he refused to live with her again. He died on the 18th of May, 1736, at the age of sixty-six.

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The Duchess lived till the 23rd of January, 1753, but, despite her elaborate funeral, her death almost passed without notice. Madame de Deffant, who had known her for thirty years, who had lived with her in the years of her own embarrassment, and who had been rehabilitated by means of her salon, does not even mention her in a letter she wrote on the day of the Duchess' death. For, as a matter of fact, this woman, who made such a sensation in the world, had not the faculty to establish anything on a firm foundation, not even friendship. She was in advance of her time, and already foreshadowed that generation of restless nobility, who, brave and witty as they were, had no fixed beliefs and no pre-occupation beyond their own pleasure—the generation that preceded and precipitated the Revolution. Madame du Maine never acted on disinterested impulse. Ambitious, proud, and intensely selfish, she injured herself and her family more than anyone else. Though she was able, on occasions to dazzle the senses, she never succeeded in touching the heart.

### NOTE ON THE MESDEMOISELLES DE BLOIS

Two of the legitimized daughters of Louis XIV bore the name of Mademoiselle de Blois.

The one, born in 1666, was the daughter of Louise de la Vallière, and married in 1680 Louis Armand, Prince de Conti, a nephew of the Great Condé.

The other, born on the 4th of May, 1677, was the youngest daughter of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan. She married the Duc de Chartres, and so, later on, became Duchesse d'Orléans.

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